

THE HEIRLOOM



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THE HEIRLOOM

OR

THE DESCENT OF VERNWOOD MANOR

BY

T. DUTHIE-LISLE

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VOL. I.

LONDON

GAY AND BIRD

27, KING WILLIAM STREET, WEST STRAND

1893

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BUTLER & TANNER,
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,
FROME, AND LONDON.



PREFACE.

IT is the not unpleasing office of the writer of fiction to unfold for the delectation of his readers the pages and pictures of the volume of life; and none know better than the true novelist that the wildest schemes which his imagination can conceive, the marvellous combinations which a turn of the magic kaleidoscope of eventualities, and what we misname fortune, may produce, are again and again out acted in real life.

With this apology the incidents of the following story are committed to the criticism of an indulgent, and the writer trusts, a not too severely critical world.

THE AUTHOR.

Christmas, 1892.

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CHAPTER I.

DARK SHADOWS.

“ LOOK ! look ! Massey, Massey. There it is ! Yes ! there ! there ! there ! You see it not ? Nay, you must ! Oh God ! You mean to say you don’t see it now ! Massey ? You fool me ! Heaven forbid that you should, I who almost reared you, gave you freedom ! Gave it ! no I am wrong, bought it, bought it with a price. Ah too, and at what a price ! A price that cannot be counted in dollars or pounds, and now you laugh at me, laugh at me, mock me, befool me, nay ignore me, now in this hour when all the world stands aloof, now that I can look to neither God nor man for aid. Now all my wealth is being measured at its proper worth. You too Jules Massey, you side with

all the world and leave me to face this dark hideous shadow alone." "Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Yes, there it is again;" and the speaker started up and laughed out a long, hollow, delirious laugh, sounding like something unearthly, something uncanny rather than the rational articulation of human tongue.

Just then the chimes from the distant stable tower adjacent to the mansion fell upon his ear, and he stopped to listen and to count. "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve. Yes, the witch doctress foretold that it should turn 'red, and be a sign of evil impending when midnight music sounded at the rising of the moon.' Massey! I say Massey! Step out through the casement on to the terrace and tell me what of the night, whether is visible or hidden the face of the moon! Nay; but stay one moment Massey, leave me not now. Ha, ha, there it stands again. Fool. You mean to say you see it not now. There, there, there, there," and the

speaker as he sat up in bed, pointed with his long wasted finger, and gazed wildly, with starting eyeballs and terrified stare at some imaginary object that appeared to his disordered vision to be moving across the room.

The individual addressed as Massey was a coloured man of the true negro type of the Southern American States. No half-bred apologetic representative of his people was Jules Massey, with his crisp woolly hair, and a face which shone almost like some highly polished, ebony-carved visage, of the shiny blackness of a block of coal. And yet there could be said to be nothing cringing, nothing of servility—notwithstanding his long years of servitude—in the natural demeanour of Jules Massey. His personality was one of those which might be so far taken for anything, that they may be almost said to be devoid of any distinct personality at all! A man that you might pass in a crowd, or in the street, and look upon as a negro—or rather you would have

said a coloured gentleman—of superior intelligence, culture, and physique, an admirable specimen of manhood, notwithstanding the blackness of his skin. God forbid that I should aver that blackness of skin should necessarily be associated with any inferiority of mental calibre, however downtrodden and oppressed. But early emancipation from the debasing influence of slavery, and the training of an intelligence of natural brightness—the sowing of the seed of knowledge in good ground—had been productive of its result, and Jules Massey though born of slave parents on a Virginian plantation, his childhood surrounded with all the horrors of slave life, prior to those sanguinary feuds between North and South which brought with it the freedom of every slave—by education had risen immeasurably above the ordinary run of his class and race. His superiority may have been due to his own brightness, his own quickness of perception.

The slave boy Jules Massey had become the body-servant of his master even at a boyish age, thereby enjoying comparative ease and freedom, and the advantage of frequent travel with his master, while others of his kith and kin were sweltering on the hot rice and cotton fields, and felt the smart of the overseer's whip and the heat of the Southern sun.

Far from his native State, attendant on his master, Jules Massey often lounged in comparative luxury when his own parents, or brothers and sisters, endured the pains of slavery at home.

But it must not be thought that in those hours of idleness and ease, Jules Massey forgot the lot of those still dear to him, for affection is no stronger in the breast of the white man than in the heart of the slave. By no means, but more of this anon.

Stepping through the casement of the library, a small room adjoining and leading to the sleeping apartment, and now the sick room

of his master, where he lay raving in the throes of delirium, Jules Massey stood upon a broad terrace which, overshadowed by a verandah-like roof, the ornamental iron-work supports of which, over-run with a luxurious growth of creeping plants, formed in the summer evenings an enticing and attractive retreat, a retreat alas, which the master and owner of that house, as he lay there within on his bed of sickness seemed little likely ever again to enjoy.

As the favoured body-servant stood for those few minutes out in the stillness of the summer night, all nature seemed to be supremely still. Around him, far on every side, there extended lawns and *parterres* in which every botanic rarity seemed to bloom. Here groupings of costly marble statuary glistened in unsullied purity of hue, and matchless symmetry of form, there a tiny cataract or gurgling fountain bubbled forth crystal waters of a purity to immerge the very gods! Here might be seen a grot

within the seductive shade of which even fairies might not disdain to woo, there a mimic cavern, from whose fern and moss grown depths the fall of limpid waters soothed the very air.

Beyond this, on every side, the steep and declivitous hillsides were clothed with woods, while far and near, over the glades and woodlands, over the meadows and cornfields, gilding the bosom of the broad still lakelet with a golden and silvery sheen, rising in all the fulness of its glory, shone out the great red face of the harvest moon.

In its perfect peace and restfulness all nature around him was fair and beautiful to look upon.

A profound and peaceful silence, broken only by the distant occasional yelp of a fox in the deep woods, or the weird unmusical hoot of a barn-owl as it flew across the shadowy lea, seemed to reign supreme.

As his eye roamed over the wide demesne of Vernwood it seemed to offer all that human heart could desire, and yet its lord and master,

the inheritor of all those fair broad acres, of all those tree-crowned hill-tops, of all those dark still glades, he whose sole prerogative, whose whole vocation, it was to enjoy, was bereft of all power of enjoyment, and now that the clouds of death seemed fast settling around, and closing in their impenetrable darkness before his eyes, and now that the relentless angel stood ready to beckon him away, neither his broad acres, nor his accumulating millions, could secure to Bertram Gonault a moment's respite, or buy back for him satisfaction, or retrieve one day of squandered life. Had not Vernwood and its princely revenues which he owned given him years of opportunities of pleasure, real and substantial! Yet now would he not gladly have bartered all his patrimony for a single year of extended life.

The body-servant stepped back from the calm and peaceful moonlight into the study, and thence into the sleeping room where, tossing and delirious, Bertram Gonault lay. How

wide, how solemn, and fearful a contrast from that peaceful moonlit scene without was his master's chamber within, where he raved and struggled against the pangs and anguish of remorse, for the consciousness of his wasted opportunities and much of ill-spent life!

The room where the sick man lay was a lofty chamber of no great size, but panelled around with oak panellings of some past epoch, which, although darkened by age, were yet untouched by time, or undisfigured by the ravages of decay.

A single oil lamp standing on a table and turned on to half its brightness, served only in a modified degree, to dispel the darkness, while doors and windows were draped with heavy sombre hangings, lending to the interior an added gloom.

But over all this there loomed, with unmistakable foreboding, the one great shadow, the feeling of the certainty of impending death. The gaunt wrecked frame, the wild stare, the

delirious laugh, the pallid features, drawn, sunken, and emaciated by sickness and disease.

But that haunted imagination was not the death of the sinless, it was not the calm peaceful ebbing away of a well-spent life, it was not the heavenward flight of the soul from its tenement corporeal of clay. But it was the tumultuous struggle of the haunted spirit, the fierce fight to escape the cold inexorable grip of the grave. Neither did the king of terrors seem merciful to cut short the agony of dissolution, for day by day the life of Bertram Gonault seemed to trickle away as it were by a rill of torturing agony rather than to sink as the sun of a summer's day calmly to its appointed rest.

The days and nights during which he knew that he was slowly slowly dying, gave him in his lucid intervals only the more time to look back with contrition on so much of wasted life, a life from which he had left out very much that he ought to have done, into which had

entered much that ought not to have been done. Who among us but must confess the same! But to Bertram Gonault, as he lay there, thoughts of contrition came and laid their burden of remorse upon his spirit as with a heavy hand.

Strong as he once was, and weak as he now lay, he had squandered health; rich as he was he had squandered and misused his wealth.

But whatever the fortunes or vicissitudes of his family might once have been, Bertram Gonault, as he lay on that bed of sickness or of death, was even yet the possessor of such wealth as was literally and practically almost beyond one man's powers to dissipate utterly or to spend. If a millionaire must be defined as a man who owns ten hundred thousand pounds, then the extent of Bertram Gonault's wealth surpassed by long figures the limits of that magic word, and somehow, as he lay there, he seemed troubled far more in its possession than other men would have been in the lack of

it. When he was gone, what could possibly become of all his riches? He had asked himself the question day by day! And it was a question which would or which might have puzzled a wiser head than had grown upon the shoulders of Bertram Gonault.

As the two men were together in the gloom of the darkened room, it was with genuine and unfeigned pity that the black-faced negro looked on the once strong form of the white sufferer, now so prostrate, now laid, now sunk so low, so very low. Black and white as they were they had been almost boys together, there was infinitely more between them than between master and servant, it was companionship, brotherhood, for as Bertram Gonault lay there every inch a wreck, dependent for even bread and water, so Jules Massey stood there every inch a gentleman and a man. Within his stalwart frame there throbbed a woman's tenderness of heart, united to the muscular development of an athlete he had a child's gentleness

of hand. He reminded you of the steam hammer, which can be used with the gentleness to crack a nutshell without injuring the contents, or to exercise the power to flatten a block of iron, or of the strength of an elephant, which he can employ either to lift a needle or uproot a forest tree. Such men, whether black or white, are the highest development of manhood, the nearest to perfection of our race.

And Bertram Gonault too! mere shadow, mere caricature, mere mockery as he now was of his former self, had in his earlier days been no despicable specimen of man. His tall form once stood erect and graceful as the reed, his head of fine intellectuality was but sparsely covered with locks of thin dark hair, his face was handsome though its right side was lightly scarred with some long-healed wound of childhood which he must carry to his grave. Its expression would have been fine, but was somewhat marred by a cynical, almost mocking,

almost Mephistophelian smile, which either designedly or by accident he had heightened and intensified by the cultivation of that well-stiffened pointed moustaches on his upper lip, like those we see in Goethe's representations of the character of the tempter in his immortal legend of "Faust."

This is an idea of what Bertram Gonault had been rather than what, as he lay prostrate on that bed a broken man, who had seen hardly more than fifty years of life, he now was.

But the mere wreck of the body that was not all, the mind too was unhinged ; with his weakness of body his mental infirmity gained in ascendancy. His imagination seemed ever to be haunted with some spectre, which although invisible to the eyes or mind of the body-servant, left the poor victim of the hallucination but few intervals of lucidity or mental peace, and when these short intervals of rightmindedness came, these rifts in the dense banks of cloud that enclosed his mind, the poor

sufferer would sink back upon his pillow exhausted, only to start up wildly as the dark shadow of his delusion again rose up and took possession of his mind.

CHAPTER II.

VERNWOOD.

THE demesne of Vernwood was situated in a locality, which I need not particularize more definitely than to say that it occupied a romantic position in one of those English counties—of which there are four—which border directly on the principality of Wales, a propinquity which had the effect of lending to the estate that charm of woodland and mountain scenery which forms one of the striking characteristics of what I will take the liberty of dubbing *bijou* Britain.

Although the acreage was still extensive, (notwithstanding that mortgages had from time to time, by the process known among lawyers as foreclosure, lopped off certain outlying por-

tions in order to liquidate their little claims,) yet the house was not a palace, it could hardly even be said to rank among "the stately homes of England."

But Vernwood was above all things a home,—a perfect English home,—built and arranged for comfort and domesticity rather than with any attempt at display. One of those places hallowed in the eyes of childhood, and which, when its little joys and sorrows have become merged and expanded into the cares, and greater and intenser struggles of later life, we look back upon with regretful satisfaction and mellowed love.

The propinquity of the mountainous principality had too another advantage, for it included the once unsuspected or unthought of, or at least neglected presence beneath the often apparently barren surface of mineral wealth.

But of this I shall have to deal at a later stage of my tale.

To this enviable inheritance,—an inheritance

with its boundless opportunities—an inheritance which many men would have turned to splendid account,—Bertram Gonault had become under somewhat peculiar circumstances the heir.

The great American war of 1860–5 between the North and South, which ended in the assassination of the patriot President Abraham Lincoln, and wiped off from the face of civilization the stupendous blot of slavery on the American continent, and brought with it the freedom of the slave, left, like many others, (or appeared to leave) Hubert father of Bertram Gonault, his heir presumptive, in the position of impoverished men. At least so thought Bertram Gonault himself and so thought all who knew him.

It was a goodly number of years since Hubert Gonault had emigrated from the old country, from the ancient ancestral home of his race, from Vernwood, at that time rapidly falling into decay, where rank wild weeds grew

high about the untended lawns, on which want and poverty, desolation and decay at that time seemed then to stalk rampant and ghost-like, where once upon a time the ring of childhood's merry laugh had echoed.

The demon of gambling, high play and reckless living had converted what was once a home into this wilderness of rank neglected growth, while the ruinous extortion of usurers had sapped the once lordly revenues of Vernwood to the very core.

Such briefly was the state of family affairs at Vernwood when Hubert Gonault a good part of a century prior to the occurrence of the circumstances which I am relating, scraped together what little the Jews and money-lending fraternity had left him of so fair a patrimony, discarded and left in the lurch the dissolute associates and boon companions whose temptations had landed him in such desperate straits, shook the dust of England and of Vernwood from his feet, and set sail for that then New

World of which so many fabulous stories, and so many bright accounts at that time came like echoes floating to Britain across the Western seas.

But it is no very easy task, humanly speaking, for a transplanted tree to take root in an alien soil, and many risks attend every such attempt.

The schemes of the reformer may appear very grand in his own eyes, they may fire his own imagination with admiration as the fancied offspring of his own genius, even as we foster a natural child; he may affect to despise those time-tried institutions which have stood the test of centuries. But before we uproot and cast from us the respected traditions of the past, let us make quite sure that there is greater virtue to be found in the new.

Hard and painful as was the snapping asunder of old ties at home, perhaps Hubert Gonault found it easier even to rid himself from the trammels of usury, to become an alien

and a wanderer on the face of the great new world which he had adopted, than he did to find, when there, a spot whereon his wandering foot might be stayed, or a roof above him, or a pillow whereon to lay his head.

But after many vicissitudes in the foreign land the foot of the wandering heir at length found rest.

Hubert Gonault became in those days the owner of extensive farms or plantations and numerous slaves in the State of Virginia.

From that time his wealth gotten of slave labour seemed to increase.

Who had been the wife of Hubert Gonault, whether he had a wife at all, nobody seemed to know,—in the new country which he had adopted, nobody—for morals were lax in those days—seemed very much to care. “Squire” Gonault, as he was called, paid his way well, was a successful planter, was reputed rich, and *was* rich. Moreover, having been born on English soil, he was less convinced than as if

he had been reared in its midst, of the righteousness of the horrid slave system upon which he throve.

He believed his slaves were human, he knew that they were flesh and blood and spirit and soul, and not mere brutes and chattels with no more individuality than his cattle, or his dining-room tables and chairs, to be bought and sold at their owner's will.

Besides, Hubert Gonault had brought with him from the old country, a strong tincture of that old feudal sentiment which believes in the retainer's right of reliance on the protection of the feudal lord, rather than in the coercive persuasion of the lash. Thus it was that the slave system as conducted on the Millbank Estate, as Hubert Gonault's Virginian property was called, was for those days an easy service, and "Massa" Gonault, in the eyes of the slave population of his plantation, was something like a demi-god. His slaves were well housed, well cared for, and well fed, hence he secured

a corresponding return in the quantity of labour he received. Apart from all considerations of humanity it paid him well to look to the condition of his slaves, in the same way that it pays the well-to-do British agriculturalist of to-day to attend to the comfort and cleanliness of his live-stock. The positions are perfectly parallel. Man is oftener than not treated worse by his fellows than a brute.

Although whether Hubert Gonault had a wife or not, or if so whether she were living or dead, none seemed to know or care; his son the young Bertram, grew up by his father's side before the world, a strong young man with apparently every advantage in life. Money supplied without stint enabled him to gratify his every desire. That his desires were none of the healthiest the sum total of his life as I have shown him in the previous chapter will be evidence enough.

But in what demagogues have called "the manufacture of history" and in the course of events, all this was changed.

The elements of disruption which had long been smouldering, burst forth into flame and the fiery brand of war was carried through the land.

Joining the army of North Virginia, Hubert Gonault as a planter—although as we have said never too strongly convinced of the righteousness of the cause of which he was a representative and which he espoused—buckled on his armour, left his home and plantations and slaves in the doubtful care of overseers, and followed General Lee through many battles almost unscathed.

In these events which have now passed into history the old planter Hubert Gonault's stalwart young son Bertram was never far in his father's rear or from his father's side.

But at the battle of Five Forks, the last of the sanguinary struggle between North and South, Hubert Gonault fell, and the son Bertram, in the midst of all the carnage mire ruin

and disaster which it brought, wept as he closed his father's eyes, and as through the drifting clouds the fitful moonbeams fell upon a face which paled and every moment grew more set and livid in the grasp of death. And on that fitful moonlit night as the young man Bertram Gonault bent over a dying parent, as he sought to stay the flow from a ghastly wound, as Hubert Gonault passed away, at the same time slavery had ceased to be a law of the United States, and all men, irrespective of creed or colour, were free.

To the vanquished cause, after those long five years of struggle and bloodshed, it was as if some fearful force of nature had torn up an accursed system of human bondage by the roots, and scattered it as the autumn winds scatter the leaves which hang loosely on the trees.

The War of Emancipation was over, had been fought and lost and won, and practically young Bertram Gonault stood up on the

American continent with clothes on his back, some few dollars in his pocket it is true, but his cause for ever vanquished fallen and lost, his past obliterated, and he himself to all intents and purposes ruined and hopeless.

CHAPTER III.

MEMORIES FLOWN.

SOME six months from his father's death the young Bertram Gonault landed in England an impoverished, a despondent, if not quite an absolutely ruined man, the coloured boy Jules Massey as his sole companion and attendant, his sole surviving coloured dependant, and that out of pure affection for his master, an attendant at will out of hundreds of slaves.

And then Bertram Gonault, when he had cleared his luggage through the Liverpool Custom House, stood on English soil as much a stranger, as much a foreigner, as much an alien, as some three-quarters of a century before his father Hubert Gonault had stood virtually exiled on the soil of the great new country

which he had then adopted and made his home.

As it had once been the father's, now it became the son's turn to seek a place whereon to rest his foot, and a shelter whereunder to lay his head.

He cast about him for his future. Often had his father told him of Vernwood, their beautiful Anglo-Welsh home, the home of his race, where generations of their forefathers had lived and died. And naturally as the two, the then mere boy Jules Massey and young Bertram Gonault, roamed together the streets of Liverpool, the thoughts of the latter turned towards the place which occupies of all others in the heart of a colonist or emigrant so large a place, for whether he amass fortune and succeed, or whether as a crestfallen failure he return to his native land, in either case he yearns for that speck of earth, whether castle or cottage, which he owns as home.

Of the few, the very few kith or kin of his

father's who were in England or alive even Bertram Gonault knew naught, and they likely would know less of him. Who would know aught of the son of the spendthrift improvident heir of Vernwood who left his country a good part of a century before, in debt and disgrace, and whose very memory none would be anxious to revive.

Bertram Gonault had not arrived in England utterly penniless. He had snatched up some little flotsam from the tide of affairs and wreckage caused by the great storm of war which had overswept the land.

Having become wearied of Liverpool the natural force of gravitation affected him, and attracted towards London, that mighty loadstone of the world, he found himself ere very long wandering about its endless labyrinth of streets, the young Jules Massey still by his side, but in even greater solitude and wonder at its very vastness, its complications, and its marvellous diversity of interests, than he had been in the great seaport

of the North. Its magnitude filled him with astonishment and awe. But as his first impressions paled he began more calmly to look about him and to think. He thought of and sought a certain firm of solicitors with whom in brighter days his father had associated the name of Vernwood.

After many and lengthy consultations of Directories and Law Lists, and inquiries in likely quarters, Bertram one day found himself wandering curiously about certain streets in the vicinity of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

An air of dry uninteresting documents and forensic details seemed to the young Virginian to fill the very air. There was not the bustle and activity of the commercial life of the City, which seemed to be as the condition of another sphere. There reigned everywhere that air of sacredness and quietude which seems ever to pervade the precincts of the abode of law.

At length Bertram's careful study of repeated tiers and lists of names, inscribed in black

letters upon the painted entrance halls of some substantially built old houses, revealed a name which seemed to rivet his attention and arouse in him a degree of interest surpassing all the rest.

MESSRS. WYNDHAM AND LUMLEY,
Solicitors.

For some minutes Bertram stood gazing at the superscription, absorbed in thought. Then slowly, one by one, he mounted the broad solid stone stairs and opened one of several doors upon which the words " Clerks' Office " had once been written clearly but now was dimmed and almost worn out with time.

To the experienced mind there is much to be learned or inferred from the names on office doors, and, but that this is no place for digressive dissertations on common things, I might write an essay on their character, varieties, and intent. It is enough, however, to relate here that the names on Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley's door would have indicated to the

experienced, that the firm known as Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley was a very old and reputable firm indeed. There was an air of substance and respectability about the clerks and employés, and even about the very oak panels and massive brass handles of their office doors, there was no denying that, and when Bertram Gonault ventured to enter, he was asked his business by a young man whose demeanour and bearing was such as to indicate that Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley's usual visitors were gentlemen and not cads. His manner of address was something so utterly foreign to the too familiar "Well boss what's for you?" of American civilization, of which Bertram knew as much as of English matters and mannerisms he had experienced little, that the young American smiled.

And Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley's clerk too, accustomed as he was to conceal his own mental impressions beneath that diplomatic veneer which we call politeness, and good

breeding, he too was a trifle puzzled at the American-looking young man whose aspect was not quite that of, indeed was something quite different from, the sleek and respectable Great British landed proprietor class, who were their ordinary clients, and from whose pockets and acres Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley derived a large slice of the valuable conveyancing practice which they enjoyed.

The clerk took all this in at a glance ; however he was still more perplexed when Bertram asked for Mr. Wyndham the senior partner of the firm, as it then appeared written on the doors.

“ Well sir,” at last the clerk replied hesitatingly, “ I—I—I can’t say I have ever seen Mr. Wyndham—but about twice sir, or three times at most, and I have been here five years, I think I have heard that he retired from the firm almost forty years ago sir, now.”

The representative of infant America opened his eyes very wide indeed.

Forty years ! a firm forty years old ! It was about as old as the history of the United States ; and Bertram received his first really practical lesson in English and Old World history.

“ Would you like to see Mr. Lumley sir ? ” politely asked the clerk. “ He is in.”

“ Waall—yes, then, I guess I would,” drawled Bertram betraying an unmistakable Americanism of tone.

“ What name shall I say sir ? ” asked the clerk.

“ Gonault, Mr. Bertram Gonault ! ”

The clerk disappeared, but without word or look of recognition, which could tell Bertram that his name or that of his family was ever mentioned in Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley’s office either disparagingly or the reverse.

Americans think much of history and tradition, and value above most things their associations, either historical or present, with the Old World. Bertram had been told by his father that he had sprung from a good old English

stock, but certainly there was no sign that his family traditions were cherished in Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley's office whether they were good or bad.

The next minute Bertram was invited into the private office of the then head of the firm.

Mr. Lumley was a man well on in life. His face had the flabby paleness begot of an indoor, sedentary life, his hair was blanched to that hue of silvery or snowy whiteness which comes of years of continuous and heavy mental toil, and the weight of forensic details had left their impress upon every line. The lawyer was seated before a large office table piled with heaps of folded documents bound and restrained with coils of red tape.

On the entrance of the young American he looked up, but there was not that ready cordial recognition, the extending of the hand, which the important lawyer would have accorded to a client from whose operations in broad acres or

City ground rents he was reaping a rich harvest of fees.

Mr. Lumley's experience was confined mostly to the precincts of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the dry details of the law; he was in no way a cosmopolite, his longest vacation, and farthest travels were three weeks spent at Brighton, at that time of year when his ordinary clients were potting grouse on Scotch moors. Consequently he viewed the young American, or whatever he might be, with an eye of doubt not unmixed with suspicion. Certainly he hadn't the look of a man out of whom he could expect much. As for the name of Gonault he knew nothing of that, or only thought he had some faint glimmering in his mind. And so there was no smile of welcome on the lawyer's face as he eyed the young man before him. However, common civility prompted him to point to Bertram Gonault a chair which stood in such a position that the light from the window struck full into Bertram's face, while it left his own in semi-

shade. Lawyers are apt to put their clients into so placed chairs.

But Bertram Gonault had nothing to conceal, therefore he had nothing to fear.

Then the solicitor put down his pen, leant back in his chair, and waited for his visitor to begin.

Bertram was no diplomatist, he had no idea of beating about the bush, so straight to the point he went.

“I guess I am rightful heir to a parcel of real estate in your country, at a place called Vernwood, somewhere near Wales County I should imagine it would be, which has been handled by your firm. It belonged to my father before he left this country for America, and as he has been killed in the war I am come to make my claim.”

At this succinct and important statement the lawyer opened wide his eyes and ears.

“Well yes,” he replied in a dry judicial tone when Bertram had finished, “well yes; even taking it for granted that what you say is true

sir, according to the law and practice of this country, you would have beyond question first to establish your identity, and then to substantiate your claim. You say your late father had business relations with our firm. But it was certainly not in my time," and Mr. Lumley eyed the young man closely as if he almost doubted the truth of all he had said and half believed his whole tale was a fabrication, and—in short—a fraud.

"But I'll tell you what I will do. I will communicate with our late principal Mr. Wyndham on the subject, or I will give you his address and you can do so for yourself, or I will do both, you can make your own appointment and I will write to Mr. Wyndham by to-night's post. He is an old man now Mr. Gonault—past ninety,—has been out of the law many years, but he is clear-headed and perhaps his memory will carry him back to your father's time. Good day, Mr. Gonault," and this time the somewhat pompous lawyer extended his

hand and smiled with some faint show of cordiality in his manner and tone.

When Bertram Gonault stood on the pavement outside of Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley's office he felt he had taken one step on the right road.

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Rose Mead was the pleasant name, of a pleasant villa, not far from the now well built upon vicinity of Brixton Hill, where, surrounded by gardens devoted to the cultivation of roses of every known variety and hue, the old ex-lawyer, Horace Wyndham, was spending in retirement, the closing years of his long and once busy legal life.

It was well within a week of his visit to the office of Mr. Lumley in Lincoln's Inn Field's, that Bertram Gonault, by appointment, pushed open the gate, and walked between veritable plantations of rose trees, up to the front door of the substantial-looking villa of

Rose Mead. He rang, was admitted, and conducted by a man-servant into the study or library of Mr. Horace Wyndham.

Although Mr. Wyndham was within seven years of being a centenarian, the healthful recreations of his many declining years seemed almost like a continual infusion into his system of the rejuvenating essences of perennial youth.

Perhaps it was that the retired gentleman had left behind him, or forgotten, the habitual caution and suspicious-mindedness of the practising lawyer in his office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, perhaps it was that the peaceful cultivation of rose trees rendered it unnecessary that the acuter side of his understanding should be kept alert. At any rate the welcome which Bertram Gonault met with, as the old man walked hale, erect, and smiling into his study to welcome his American visitor, was quite another thing from the somewhat cold and almost repellant reception which he received at the hands of the unimpressible, and almost

unpleasantly shrewd attorney at his business office in town.

"Yes Mr. Gonault, I received your letter," said the cheery old man in answer to Bertram's inquiry.

"Take a seat Mr. Gonault! Can I offer you a—well I am a total abstainer myself Mr. Gonault—and never smoke—but will you have a cigar, and a—a—well, anything else you like to name?"

With the Americanized custom of mixing tobacco with business, Bertram Gonault took an havannah from the proffered box and bit off the end.

"Well Mr. Gonault," began the old solicitor as the fragrant fumes rose up between them, "yes, I remember both your father and your grandfather—well! I remember your father coming up to town from Vernwood, with his father, when your father was just a mere strippling, a mere chick of a boy, and I was a clerk in our office. And so he is dead is he? fell in

the war eh, dear me! dear me! Humph! Humph! Unhappy state of affairs when he left here Mr. Gonault, very!" said the old lawyer, his voice lapsing into a tone of sadness. "Gambling! sad thing that Mr. Gonault, downfall of many a good name. However Mr. Bertram (I think that's your name) that's neither here nor there now, let by-gones be by-gones, that's my motto. What you want is to establish your claim to the Vernwood estates. Fine property too Mr. Bertram, worth a fight for, and if you are the grandson of our old friend Lawrence Gonault, and the only son of Hubert Gonault, you ought to have it, that's sure.

"Well Mr. Gonault, as to the Vernwood property, about which you are seeking information, without going into details, I can tell you this much. The property, many years ago, fell into the hands of a gang of money-lending harpies, and in their possession (or in the possession of their heirs, exors, admors, and assigns as we lawyers say), as far as I know, it remains

to this very day. The last I knew or heard of the place was, that it was let to a Captain Gillingham for a term, (and that was many years ago now). He resided in the mansion. But there is something about it which I *could* tell you, which would be to your advantage, but as a matter of business you will have first to prove your descent from Lawrence and Hubert Gonault both deceased. Mind you, I am not insinuating that any shadow of doubt exists as to your identity, none whatever !² I know that Hubert Gonault left this country for America many many years ago. But of course Mr. Gonault the law would require a proof.

“That is all I can tell you now Mr. Bertram, it is in effect all that the best lawyer in England could tell you. It is for you to supply that proof, and then we will see what’s further to be done.

“Now Mr. Bertram you will stay and dine with me, but first let’s take a turn in the gardens and I will show you my roses.”

CHAPTER IV.

DARK DAYS.

SATIATED nay almost to disgust as was Bertram Gonault, with that incessant round of change which goes on from day to day, and from hour to hour in hotel life—that unceasing round which, let its professions be never so homely, shears such a life of the semblance of home—the tentative claimant to Vernwood occupied lodgings in a quiet London street in the West end of town.

The evening of Bertram's visit to the aged ex-lawyer at his villa of Rose Mead, he had by him quite sufficient food for thought. Thus it was that he had dismissed the coloured boy Jules Massey, and sat in the huge and shabby easy—or uneasy—lodging-house chair, which he had drawn at right angles to the grate, and

gazed long and thoughtfully into the fire through the fumes of an indifferent Britishly made cigar.

The burden of proof now rested upon Bertram's own shoulders, or rather upon his own head. And the proof of what? the proof that he was his own father's son, the proof of his right, to inherit, to enjoy even his own inheritance, his due, and what he knew and believed honestly in his heart of hearts was nothing but his due. Then the old rhyme came into Bertram's mind :—

“’Tis a very good world that we live in,
To lend, or to spend, or to give in ;
But to borrow, or beg, or get a man's own,
’Tis the very worst world that ever was known.”

Still for all that, yes, from every aspect of the case, whether in equity or law both, Wyndham and Lumley were right, he must prove who he was.

As he sat there square before the blazing fire, in the solitary, dingy, stuffy, frowsy room of his

cheap London lodgings—more as London lodgings were often thirty years ago than now,—Bertram's mind seemed to roam away over land and sea in search of what he desired. Proof! Who did he Bertram Gonault know in England? Who knew, or cared a cent for Bertram Gonault? Echo seemed to answer, "Not a soul!" Among all those thousands of men and women, all those thousands of faces he met in his everyday wanderings about the inhospitable London streets, with their hurrying, scurrying, unsympathetic, money-seeking crowds, who knew who cared for Bertram Gonault? The voice of the echo seemed again to answer, "Not a soul!" In all this Europe where he had landed for refuge, who knew, who cared for Bertram Gonault? The voice of echo seemed again to answer, "Not a soul! not a soul!"

Here he was, in this great London, almost solitary,—alone, for what was Jules, the young boy Jules Massey to him, but a mere appendage?

Thus dozed and dreamed Bertram Gonault.

Then his mind wandered away in thought to the great country from whence he had come. Even there, although the outlook seemed more promising—gloomy as it everywhere was at its very best—even from thence he was a fugitive, he had fled from a wrecked inheritance, a cursed, blasted, banned, and discarded system, a defunct and vanquished cause, from a scene of disorder, topsy-turveydom, and collapse such as seem ever to follow revolution or track the wake of war, a condition of events amid which it looked as if he might almost as well seek proof of his own identity, or try to find those who could furnish it, as one might seek for renovation in the midst of ruin, or the germ of order from an universal chaos.

But often we look far and wide, we traverse weary ways in search of those riches which lay at our very doors.

Bertram Gonault, as he sat even for hours, brooding over his mischances and his ills, was

doing this, although not in measure sufficient for his ends.

He thought, and thought, and thought, and when the black boy Jules Massey returned he dismissed him at once again for the night, so that he might still be alone.

The hours rolled on past midnight. Still absorbed in his vexations and perplexities, Bertram took between his thumb and fingers the heavy circlet of gold which he always wore on the ring digit of his left hand, and musingly turned and twisted it over and over and round and round.

It was a large ring, composed of a sapphire shield in a massive setting of yellow gold.

Then with that suddenness of inspiration, attributed only to the electric fluid, and the human God imparted attribute of thought, the whole train of events flashed through the thinker's mind.

The ring was an heirloom, which, previous to interment, he had taken from his father's

finger as he lay dead on the field at Five Forks.

Often, during life, had Hubert Gonault discussed the merits and virtues and history of the valuable jewel, which his father had told him he held as it were in trust as a token of heirship through successive generations.

With an intensity of grief known to his own heart alone had young Bertram Gonault drawn that ring from off his father's bloodless and lifeless hand as he lay dying or dead after the engagement of Five Forks, when with the death of his late parent he foreknew with a prescience which was only too clear and evident to him that, together with the loss of the Southern cause, together with the Emancipation decrees which would follow the victory of the Northern forces under Generals Grant and Sherman, to the Southern slave-owning planters, the defeat which was accomplished amid the rain and storms of that fatal night must bring widespread well-nigh universal ruin in their train. As the young man bent over the expiring

parent he realized that not only had he lost the sole guardian of boyhood and youth but that he stood in a country where he had now practically no abiding place, no home.

Never from that fatal night, as the moon shone cold and full and clouded upon the battle scene, had Bertram Gonault driven from his imagination the vision of the upturned face of his dead parent, the cold touch of horror as he drew the heirloom of his race from that dead white hand.

Its remembrance, even now, seemed to haunt him as the recollection of some ghastly phantom of an unreality, of some horrid dream.

And now the whole train of circumstances, as he sat musing before the gloomy London lodging-house fire in his solitary room, rushed through his mind with the rapidity and fulness of a ray of light, an inspiration rather than a thought, one of those *impromptus* which seem to come to us when sense and intellect fails, like a flash of light from heaven. The ring

had come down through successive generations of Gonaults! was the prerogative of the heir! Did not that prove likewise his heirship to the estate of Vernwood?

The following day saw Bertram at the office of Mr. Lumley showing him the trinket. Its significance was however corroborative only, and would not of itself be of sufficient weight to convince fully the judicial mind. That was what the unsympathetic callous-hearted lawyer told him.

Then there followed another visit to the nonagenarian ex-lawyer at Rose Mead, and there again Bertram produced his evidence of identity and told its history and its tale.

Old Horace Wyndham was cheery, took Bertram's ring examined it carefully and admired it duly.

"Mr. Gonault," at length said the old man, "I have a distinct recollection of that ring as an heirloom in the possession of Lawrence Gonault."

At this Bertram's face brightened.

"Yes but that would not be sufficient evidence in the eye of the English law," Horace Wyndham added.

* * * * *

And so once more Bertram plodded back to the dingy apartments a dispirited and disappointed man, to brood over the awkward and untoward exigencies and vexatious exactions of English law. Why did they exist? Why had rational governors ever propounded such a complication of inexplicable technicalities! Why couldn't a man stand on his own right, and on his own acres and defy the whole world in his own shoes? Wasn't Vernwood his? Then why should any power on earth keep him from it and dispute his right.

As Bertram sat there in the cheap West End London lodgings, puffing bad cigars, and fuming mentally, he did what many a man, many thousands of men, and many a disappointed and impoverished litigant, has again and again been

constrained to do before and since his time, he waxed senselessly wrathful and malevolent against himself, against his progenitors, against his forbears, against the whole practice and system of English jurisprudence, which he denounced as antiquated, fossil, corrupt, unbearable, and incomprehensible from beginning to end, utterly insufficient and inadequate to the conditions and requirements of an advancing age, and needing reformation to the very core.

Yet for all that Bertram found that English laws did exist. Every visit to Mr. Lumley's office taught and convinced him of that—taught it him more and more—and he learned more and more fully the truth that what was called government existed on principles far more definite in their growth, and in their observance more honoured than was the case in the great country whence he had flown, where the rough and ready procedure of the lynch mob meted out summary castigation of none too lenient a kind, to offenders against the moral sense of the crowd.

Bertram Gonault found what others have found before, that a new training, a new beginning as it were, was needful to fit him for the slower and surer ways of the old world, and that its legal procedure any way was hedged in and defended by customs and bulwarks as invulnerable of assault and requiring the machinery and sinews of battle, just as much as if he were marching against an enemy's material fort.

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It would be irksome to the reader, beyond what the perusal of these pages demands, were I to drag him through the apparently interminable succession of sloughs and sunshines, of hopefulness and despondency, which Bertram Gonault found it necessary to traverse, and to surmount foot by foot and yard by yard ; now elated at some fancied triumph, as the rising sun of hope shone out more brightly in the heavens of his life, now cast down or in despair as the thunderclouds of legal uncertainty seemed likely

to burst and engulf and for ever to wreck his cause.

We must not suppose that during all these weary months the claimant was not in correspondence with the United States, we must not suppose that he did not admit his boy body-servant into his confidences, till one day an American steamer arrived with its freight of passengers in the Liverpool Docks, the young Jules fell upon the neck of his own mother, and the two, the once slave mother and long parted son, the boy Jules, were locked in one long embrace of filial and maternal love—a love which grows not one whit more strongly within the breast of the free white mother than within the dark bosom of the negro or the slave.

And when this meeting had taken place, when Jules had prevailed upon Bertram his master to allow his mother, his own mother Martha Massey, to appear in England as a witness, Jules at least knew that a great event of his life had come to pass, and that his

master's cause was as good as won, for again and again had Jules heard his mother say she "knowed the young Massa Bertram right from de bery day he was borned."

On the arrival in England of Martha Massey, Bertram judging that the society of the mother and son would be more congenial the one to the other, had quartered them together in a street at a convenient distance from his own lodgings.

Not unfrequently too, did the three meet at Mr. Lumley's office in the quiet street near Lincoln's Inn Fields,—and it was thus, link by link, that the able lawyer welded together his long chain of evidence, till he himself had no doubt left in his mind but Bertram Gonault was a Gonault indeed and certainly not the fraudulent pretender to Vernwood which he at one time half believed him to be.

CHAPTER V.

HOME.

BERTRAM GONAUULT had now been in London twenty months, twenty months sailing over the precarious seas of legal uncertainty and doubt, now lifted up or buoyantly and smoothly wafted onward by some favouring tide, now again stranded upon some shallow of despond, or again driven backwards by some adverse and unkindly gale. Such, indeed too surely, is the experience of those who confide their material and worldly interests to the gloriously uncertain pilotage of British law. He travels with as much certainty who commits his fate to its decisions, as does he who, ignorant of tides and winds, and currents, trusts himself to the mercy of some stormy sea.

It was this that Bertram Gonault had done, and after that dreary twenty months of uncertainty, of waiting, of doubt, he rejoiced to believe that the lights, and shore signs, and harbour marks of his desired haven were in view.

With Bertram Gonault, Vernwood was at that time the desired haven of his life.

The unstable sands of the condemned system which had once afforded him a foothold, an anchorage in life, had given way. The elements of disruption, which had long seethed beneath the surface of the deeply sin and blood stained slave system of Virginia, Kentucky, and other of the Southern States had caught, with one magnificent effort, with one supreme upheaval, volcanic in its similitude and results, it had burst asunder the shackles of a national dishonour, had wiped the reproach of slavery from its escutcheon and cast from it its darkest shame.

It would add nothing to the purpose or interest of this story, it would convert many

chapters into dry pages of legal detail, were we, step by step, to take the reader with us through the intricate quibbles and legal byways of this twenty months of his life.

It is enough here to say that some twenty months after his first call at Mr. Lumley's office, and his subsequent visit to Rose Mead, the pale-faced, white-haired lawyer, advised and directed by his clear-headed nonagenarian ex-partner and coadjutor, and with a degree of expedition quite uncommon, and quite refreshing when compared with the ordinary, deliberate procedure of English litigation, had so far, and so surely pushed forward Bertram Gonault's claim to Vernwood, that one fine summer's day, a modernized vehicle upon four wheels, drawn by two grey horses, rolled briskly through the entrance gates of Vernwood.

The equipage was evidently a hired concern, and although respectable enough of its kind, there was, to the eye of the connoisseur, just that indeterminable dissimilarity between it

and the spruce and spanking span of my lady or my lord, as there was between the coachman's livery which might have revived by the retouchings of some renovating Jew, and the faultless new broadcloth of the arrogant "Jeames" who postures behind her ladyship's chair, in all the superb importance of his "harristocratic connections" and high life below stairs.

In the vehicle aforesaid sat alone a dark-eyed, keen-featured, but handsome young man.

This hired equipage rattled boldly along the carriage drive, up to the front of the mansion, and Bertram Gonault alighted and stood a minute gazing around him absorbed in admiration. And then did Bertram mentally murmur to himself, "And this at last is home! Home!"

Was that word ever more fitly applied than when Vernwood was spoken of as "home." There are homes about us in which but little of the beneficent waters of human sympathy and human kindness seem to flow. There are

homes, beautiful homes, which those who live in them seem only to dishonour. But as Bertram Gonault stood there, easily graceful, Adonic in form, he looked as if he did no discredit to Vernwood as it lay around him at that moment as its lord. On every hand were the elements of superlative beauty.

But it was not yet the Vernwood of twenty years later, it was not the Vernwood of seventy years before. The Vernwood of twenty years later was what Bertram Gonault made it, the Vernwood of seventy years before was what the spendthrift gaming Hubert Gonault had left it, but it was Vernwood as Vernwood had stood and grown and developed through the centuries, the home of more generations of his forefathers than Bertram Gonault cared to think about or to count. And as he stood there it was Bertram's heritage, his proved possession, and sooner or later he would enter upon his own.

But as Vernwood was owned now, they who

held it held it for one object alone, to sap its revenues, to revile its beauties, to squeeze from it the most usurious percentage upon every hundred pounds which they or their forbears had advanced on the security of its broad acres, its stately oaks, its manorial rights, and its intrinsic money-producing worth, minus sentiment or emotion.

And yet with the common deserts of inordinate greed, they had cheated themselves out of the very gem of Vernwood's wealth. They had netted the oyster, they had opened its shell, they had aimed at draining it of its very life, but they had overlooked within it the existence of the priceless pearl.

But it was this pearl beyond and above all things on which the shrewd young American had fixed his eye, he was not philanthropic enough to say to those who would not hesitate to drain him, or drain his patrimony of the last dreg of the blood of life, Bertram Gonault was not philanthropic enough to say to them

“therein lays the life.” Why should he? Why should he scruple for a moment to pluck out the feathers of those who would, without compunction, divest and rob him of his very skin?

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The Captain Gillingham, of whom the old ex-lawyer Horace Wyndham had spoken to Bertram Gonault, was the occupier of Vernwood still.

His tenancy was a very long one, and again and again renewed, till it extended from Captain Gillingham's early life on into middle age, and then on again till time seemed overtaking him with its honours of silvered locks, and wise counsels and tottering tread.

If Captain Gillingham was not a man of great riches, as great riches come and go in these banking, trading, manufacturing, industrial days, still his wealth was ample for the

gratification of all the needs, as well as all the desires, and even the fads of his life, as well as enough over and to spare.

What seemed almost equivalent to a life tenancy, (or what lawyers term a seizure in fee simple) of Vernwood, suited Captain Gillingham well, and the representative of the estate, or whoever its owner might be, could not easily and readily have found a tenant all in all more suited to their views, and so from youth to age had Captain Gillingham regarded Vernwood as his home.

As far as the present tenant could see the probability of any scion of the house of Gonault ever troubling or honouring Vernwood with his presence seemed very remote, for although the trustees of the gaming Hubert Gonault had never yet absolutely and entirely lost all control of his estate, the Vernwood property was to them very much as the white elephant, which took all its earnings into its own capacious maw. And so from term to term,

each fourteen or twenty-one years, renewed as the years flew round, each period saw the ageing soldier still resident at Vernwood, and so at Vernwood he hoped to end his days.

But the outbreak of the American Civil War and its results had caused Captain Gillingham to think,—to think seriously, whether he had not built his house upon shifting sands.

Fairly well posted as the old military man was in foreign affairs, he foreknew that the effect of defeat upon the slave-owning States of the South, would be the driving of the old slave proprietors from their estates, and plantations and homesteads like covies of scared game or droves of hunted hares.

The breaking up of the slave system was like the breaking up of a stronghold of piracy, a sink of iniquity, meant the dispersion of its denizens to every point of the compass, and to the mercy as it were of the winds of heaven.

Captain Gillingham knew that Hubert Gonnault was, or rather had been, a large slave

proprietor in Virginia, he knew that it was not entirely beyond possibility for him or his heirs to reclaim and endeavour to re-establish their rights.

It was therefore with some uneasiness of mind that he learned of the arrival in England of a claimant to heirship direct, of Lawrence and Hubert Gonault, with the intention of substantiating his title to, and possibly even himself occupying their old estate, and the more so still when some eighteen or twenty months from the first rumour to this effect, an intimation from the claimant himself direct, left no doubt that Bertram Gonault considered his title proven, and expressing his intention of, in his own proper person, visiting the home of his ancestors forthwith. And therefore when the heir of Vernwood alighted from a hired vehicle which had conveyed him from an adjacent city, it was but with small surprise that he found the occupier of Vernwood grown a venerable, I may say almost a decrepit old man.

But he was not an old man in that sense in which Horace Wyndham, who carried his weight of years so brightly and cheerily, with elastic step and beaming smile, was old.

Although he might have been a good decade Horace Wyndham's junior, yet he looked his senior by an equal number of years.

But the bowed and aged figure whom Bertram Gonault encountered in Captain Gillingham had in his day, of the typical English gentleman, been the very personification, the very beau-ideal. Courteous, nay gracious almost to a fault in manner, genial in tone, an officer around whom both his inferiors and his equals loved to rally.

But as Bertram first met him, the weight of three and eighty summers and winters on his head, he had grown to be a decrepit but venerable old man, although with a countenance from which all its former pleasantness had not yet faded, yet with locks blanched almost to the whiteness of driven snow, his hand shook

and his steps were tottering, and uncertain beneath their weighty burthen of so many years.

Such, shortly, was the Captain Gillingham, whom the young man encountered as he stepped from the carriage which had conveyed him from F—— to the old Vernwood home.

As, at the invitation of his guest or tenant, Bertram Gonault entered the spacious entrance hall of the mansion, there still hung around the corridors in their narrow frames of tarnished gilt-work, many of the ancestral portraits of his race.

There hung an almost life-sized portrait, now faded and dimmed by age, but grim and bearded, of Hubert de Gonault in the chain armour of the Crusaders, to whom family history and tradition had given credit for valorous deeds when serving under the lion banner of England with Richard I.

There too the portrait of Leofric, and near it that of Calenia his wife, which in the family

muniments were stated, both by Geoffry of Monmouth and also by Guttyn Owain, to be in Saxon times the earliest representatives of the race, and whose descendants held extensive baronies and lands. There were portraits of Ingulph and Oslac, members of Bertram's remote ancestry of whom little was known.

Then in effigy, in the rude and rusty armour of the period, stood Meuric ap Idwal, who a thousand years before had fought under Rhodri Mawr, King of Wales.

Of a later date was the portrait of Rudolph, by whom was said to be entertained, with many followers, Dermot MacBurrough King of Leinster when in England to crave aid of Henry II., and Roger de Gonault, respecting whom the ancient deeds and records in the muniment room say, he married Eleanor daughter and heiress of Sir William Graveney; also, sheathed in armour, the effigy of Merlin, who fought and distinguished himself under Lord Herbert Somerset at the taking of

Terouenne and Tournay in the first year of Henry VIII.

Over portraits and effigies like these and many others the eye of the young Anglo-American roamed listlessly or curiously as he stood in the hall where so many of his forbears had walked and talked and trod.

As the young Bertram Gonault stood there he seemed lost in a reverie which conjured up many many strange and romantic forms and incidents of the past.

"Ha, ha," laughed the puerile old man, as Bertram stopped to look around him. "Ha, ha, Mr. Gonault, you see there they are, all your family history displayed before you," and Captain Gillingham endeavoured to straighten his bent form to look around him on the portrait-covered walls.

For some minutes again Bertram stood absorbed in thought. Perhaps not many things are more calculated to give rise to solemn thoughts, than to have a family history,

the ancestral train passing in one long phalanx before one's eyes.

"I welcome you to Vernwood, Mr. Gonault, I welcome you heartily. Come in, come in," said the old man, as, with the unsteady shambling gait of decrepitude, he conducted his visitor through the hall.

On Bertram's either hand still as he passed, mounted on marble pedestals, stood the grim effigies of his forefathers, some grasping their tall jousting lances and sheathed in their iron coating of rusting mail, while thrown carelessly in corners, or here and there affixed as trophies high up on the walls, were halberts and battle-axes, huge heavy double-handed swords and shields, and other implements of barbaric and unscientific war; the warring of force rather than the warring of brains, implements purporting to have been handled by brave strong-armed, heavy-handed, long-dead-and-gone generations of Gonaults.

But the heir of Vernwood was invited by

his host past all these mailed effigies into a room, in which, whatever its past history might have been, all relics of barbarism had been made to give place to the comforts, and elegances, and refinements of modern life, life in its most luxurious, most chaste, and cultured forms, where portraiture instead of being the daubings of mediæval huxters was the perfectionment of modern art.

On every side the profuse and tasteful arrangement of odd curios, hand-painted mirrors, rare china, costly volumes, vases of choice flowers, and the hundred nameless knick-knacks which infuse into life its subtlest charm, showed evidence of arrangement by a deft and gentle hand, while from an annexed conservatory the music of the falling waters of a tiny fountain, mingled pleasantly with the soft and amorous twitter in the bright warm sunlight of many caged and many coloured birds, and the balmy scent of the magnolia flowers.

“Marjorie! Marjorie,” called the old man

as he entered the library, and a minute or two later there came trippingly through the conservatory from the gardens beyond, what Bertram Gonault thought as she stepped from the surrounding setting as it were, of falling waters, of twittering birds, and balmy petalled flowers in her flowing draperies and *negligé* attire, her colour heightened by the freshest healthful flush upon her cheek of the bloom of early youth,—looked like some angel form.

“Mr. Gonault, my daughter. Marjorie, Mr. Gonault,” said the old man.

“Marjorie! This is Mr. Gonault, Mr. Bertram Gonault, Marjorie. You have heard of him yes, you have heard me speak of him. He is come to pay a visit to Vernwood.”

We have told elsewhere that Bertram Gonault was no diplomatist, that he was no practised dissembler of what he felt. To say that he was taken by surprise, taken off his guard by the unexpectedness and superlative loveliness of the vision of Marjorie Gillingham,

would be but very poorly to represent the case.

Although Bertram was a young man of experience in American life, he was not trained or skilled in drawing-room arts, he (happy young man) had hardly yet acquired the indifferent *nonchalance*, the *ennui* of the exquisite modern nineteenth-century-first-water swell who disdains even to dance, but for all this he bent very very low, for he felt rather as if he prostrated himself in the presence of some divinity, some unlooked-for goddess, some superior being; for neither Horace Wyndham nor Mr. Lumley or any one else had told him that any divinity, other than a grizzled and aged ex-captain of the Guards reigned at Vernwood. Probably no one knew much of Captain Gillingham's domestic belongings at all, beyond merely as the life-long tenant of the Vernwood estate—they recked little or naught whether he had chick, or child, or kith, or kin, and so when with his first and earliest experience

of Vernwood, came with it the beautiful vision, the beautiful day-dream, the beautiful surprise, of Marjorie Gillingham, it seemed like infusing a new-found pleasure, a new ray of brightness into Bertram's now wearied travel-tossed life. It was as if the sun had broken out and looked and smiled upon him unexpectedly from betwixt dark banks of clouds.

As becomes a daughter whom a father has introduced, Marjorie Gillingham was very gracious to their American guest, for, notwithstanding her youthfulness, on Marjorie devolved the cares, such light and pleasant cares as indeed they were, of her father's household, a household which had once—long years ago now—suffered the overshadowing of that dark cloud, the deep dark cloud of sorrow and of sadness, which ever hangs with such profound intensity of gloom over a wife and mother's grave.

And hence it was that the old man lavished on the child, who day by day unfolded into a

pure and perfect womanhood, into the almost perfect similitude, the counterpart of her whom once he had so passionately loved and yet so cruelly lost, the fullest strength of a bereaved and desolated love.

Nor was the father's love for the child less devoutly or less passionately returned.

And thus had the lives of these two rolled calmly on together, hers upward into expanding womanhood, his the declining road of life, calm, peaceful bright and beautiful, as that broad stream which swept past their beautiful Vernwood home.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE AND TREASURE.

As, in the recital of these present portions of our story, the course of events spread themselves over considerable series of years, it becomes necessary that we should from time to time indulge in long strides over certain portions of time ; or perhaps it would be more to the point were we to say, that it is necessary, for the purpose of this history, that the events happening in certain spaces of time should be chronicled only with more fleeting pen, and without that exactness with which we have sometimes portrayed the course of events with which we are concerned.

From this time forward, from his first visit, the possession of Vernwood by Bertram Gon-

aunt and his residence there, rather than as some event in far-off future, as it were in perspective, seemed more to assume the likeness of an accomplished fact.

His was not now the life of the wandering homeless adventurer, fighting almost against hope for the maintenance or the recovery of his rights, but rather that of the proven descendant of Lawrence and Hubert Gonault almost within possession of his own.

Almost his was as the home-coming of the heir.

But it was not in any respect the desire of the new-comer to displace or disturb the declining years of the aged life-long tenant of Vernwood.

* * * * *

And now rather than as owner, Bertram loitered at Vernwood as only a guest, for in fact as yet, that shrewd man Mr. Lumley had not completed those somewhat protracted formalities which were deemed necessary in the

exacting eye of the English Law, and until they were completed Bertram Gonault could not congratulate himself on being quite "Monarch of all he surveyed," on being the man in possession *pur et simple*.

He had set foot in England, if not an absolutely penniless, yet not a rich man as we have already said, and impecunious adventurers cannot become possessors in fee simple of valuable estates without any trouble at all, or as a rule without litigation enough to unhinge an ordinary mind.

But these little monetary difficulties were such, in this case, that the astute metropolitan solicitors Wyndham and Lumley pretty clearly saw their way through. Gentlemen reared and trained and schooled in the law have a knack of seeing their way through, nay of overcoming such obstacles, while other and commoner and more simple-minded mortals lay floored, helplessly floundering, and in nautical phrase "upon their beam ends."

In this transitional state were affairs when one day as Bertram was lounging in the library where he had become a sort of guest at pleasure of Captain and Marjorie Gillingham (and to the latter of whom the society of the young American claimant seemed in no way distasteful), a letter was handed to him which bore a London postmark and was inscribed in that unmistakable style of caligraphy externally, which admitted of no doubt in the recipient's mind that its place of emanation and origin was Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley's office.

Bertram broke the seal and read.

"So Lumley has squared Parkfield," he said thoughtfully as he glanced rapidly through the plain, legible, clerkly caligraphy in which was inscribed, in that concise and definite style, peculiar to epistles by which the profession instruct their recipients on details of law.

Now Parkfield was, or speaking more exactly, the name of Parkfield represented the largest

of the remaining charges on the Vernwood lands, which up to now had not been absolutely or actually within Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley's control, and the importance of Bertram's communication as to "squaring Parkfield" will be appreciated fully by the intelligent, as it will be seen that it meant the breaking down of the last of the many bulwarks and perplexities, which stood between Bertram Gonault and the practically final substantiation of his claim, the attainment of his rights.

Perhaps not unnaturally it was with an exultant tone that Bertram unthinkingly gave expression to his thoughts.

But the greyhaired old man who sat opposite to him, reading the *Times*, laid down its broad sheet with a deep long-drawn respiration, it was a respiration which could not be called anything less heartfelt or less ominous than a groan.

Bertram Gonault glanced across the room at his aged white-haired host with very much

surprise, for a groan implies pain, deep sorrow of heart, or regret, and these were sentiments which the young American under the circumstances could be hardly expected to share or to feel.

“And they will have us turn out of the old house,” he murmured, almost querulously, apparently as much addressed to himself in soliloquy, as to either Bertram or his own daughter Marjorie, who sat near him.

“Why who wants? Who ever will want you to turn out of the old home?” asked Bertram.

After a long pause, Captain Gillingham turned to his paper in a peevish discontented mood, and after the manner of some old men, from its boldest leader, down to the fluctuations of the most insignificant stock on the Exchange, continued item by item, to wade slowly and laboriously through the weighty matter of the “Leading Journal” from end to end.

Marjorie's busy fingers flew deftly but nervously through the mazy toils of some shadowy wool work on which she was engaged, as she sat watching his every mood, by her father's side.

"Then how are we to stay here?" at length fretfully resumed the old man, "if the house is to be turned inside out, and everything to be turned upside down?"

Once more he laid aside his *Times*.

"The house is not to be turned inside out," Bertram replied, "or upside down."

Beating with his foot with an air of impatience on the floor, the pettish old man once more relapsed into thought or into what is called a brown study.

"If I live here on the estate, what is to prevent my occupying the Dower House?" asked Bertram. "The other day as I passed there in my rambles I saw that the house was void, in fact it looks as if on the verge of tumbling down."

This suggestion seemed to impart to Captain Gillingham a new light on to the position of affairs.

On a wide rocky plateau or cleft, on the side of one of the successive and wooded hills which was the leading natural feature of Vernwood, in fact that feature which, above all, went to make up its natural beauty, some past or forgotten owner had taken advantage of what, from its unique surroundings, was a site of unequalled beauty for the erection of a cottage, now known as the Dower House.

Whatever might have been the purpose of its originator, from whatever it might have derived the appellation by which it was known, the Dower House or Dower Cottage of Vernwood had from time to time been used as a subsidiary abode or convenience to the great house, or from time to time, sooner than be allowed to lapse into that state of dilapidation into which unused residences commonly fall, had been occupied by some servant of the

estate, or from time to time again it had remained void.

It was in this condition that it had been observed by the new claimant in his wanderings of inspection over his newly acquired estate.

With its well planned, and once well tended gardens, its vineries, its stable accommodation, its domestic offices, the Vernwood Dower House possessed all the accessories and adaptability of separate and independent residence, a dwelling as distinct from the household of Vernwood mansion as if it had been another abode.

What might have been the purpose for which it had been by its original builder intended was not clearly known, but like other portions of Vernwood, it had shared and survived the many vicissitudes of fortune and of time, which with the successive generations of those who had occupied it had overtaken and been the lot and history of the estate.

It was of this then, that Bertram was thinking, when he spoke to Captain Gillingham of the Dower House, in the event of his finally establishing his title to the property, as his own.

* * * * *

And so it came to pass within some few months of this, that the Dower House passed into the hands of a small army of painters and decorators, and those other refurbishers, whose function it is to reanimate, and by their touches to revive the smile of beauty on to the prosaical side of life, to make a wicked and ordinary world as near an approach to fairydom as, with the contamination near it of fallen and erring humanity, it is possible by human hands aided by human intelligence, to accomplish or assume.

Possessed of all its own natural advantages, the surroundings of the Dower House became, under Bertram Gonault's directions, metamor-

phosed as under the magic spell and influence of some necromancer's wand. Lawns and gardens, which had relapsed almost into a primeval exuberance of overgrowth, were tamed by culture and horticultural art. Architectural ornamentation now stood where ruin and decay had once scarce left together stone on stone, while its interior, by the introduction of those embellishments which wealth and art and taste can accomplish, became transformed into the likeness of the tiny garden palace of some fabled potentate of Eastern lore.

* * * * *

Fairly resident on his own property, and impelled by the American spirit of enterprise which he had caught from his origin with the feverish energy of that adventurous land, Bertram Gonault's activity in his affairs became incessant and intense.

The luxuriance of his Southern habits notwithstanding, if all the traditions of his house were not revived, if all the rude splendours of

an historic ancestry should not be outshone by the more costly, more splendid, more refined, more artistic developments of modern culture the fault should not be Bertram Gonault's. So Bertram mentally resolved.

That which had, as we have said, been overlooked or forgotten by the over-reaching rapacity of those harpies whose talons had become imbedded in Vernwood, the new owner saw and appreciated, and valued at its fullest importance and force.

Machinery, powerful in construction, almost weird in aspect, arrived and was set up on the distant outlying lands of the estate.

At every turn were met men rugged of aspect, of exteriors unkempt, with horny hands, burly bearded men, rough and loud in talk, men who are the sinew and marrow of our world, whose lives are half spent in the bowels of the earth, grubbing in darkness for its greatest light, digging and delving that those above them may luxuriate in the fruits of their

toil, digging and delving that others may spend, digging and delving that others may enjoy, digging and delving that others may grasp, and appropriate, and lavish, and squander, and scatter the riches of earth which their sinew and muscle and hardihood and even their lives secure.

Barren-looking moors, which his forefathers would have bartered away as worthless to pay the pressing claims of extortionate mortgagees, Bertram Gonault converted into a multiplication and a rolling over and over of wealth. That which others had made only to minister to their extravagance and dissipation Bertram converted into mines of gold.

With the ebon-visaged boy Jules Massey ever attendant on him, the successful claimant had settled down into the domestic life of the Dower House, which had become beautiful by almost all that makes life desirable and beautiful to enjoy, nor was the current of life at the larger mansion in any degree changed, except

that the ever-furrowing ever-wrinkling hand of Time left, deeper and deeper, year by year, its trail of age upon Captain Gillingham's brow, bending still lower that aging form, weakening still that tottering tread, causing tremor to that palsied hand.

But simultaneously with the declining days of the old man's life, simultaneously with his growing infirmities and the puerilities of old age, which Bertram ever went out of his way to indulge, to mitigate, and to endure, another and a brighter sun arose, diffusing its rays over Bertram's life, brighter and brighter, shedding a benign and softening influence, as the unfolding of Marjorie Gillingham's ripening charms, ever spreading and maturing into a perfect womanhood, cast an energising influence over his actions, and infused a purifying and controlling and softening power into his life.

With that natural yearning and entwining which springs indigenous from true womanhood, like the tendrils of some entwining plants stretch

forth their arms, and yearn for the communion of another self, Marjorie Gillingham's heart went forth towards the stronger support of Bertram Gonault's.

No clandestine *liaison* seemed this, but one of those God-sent heaven-made unions of heart which omen felicitously for both happiness in this world and perhaps happiness and a still greater longer and more unbroken and enduring union, a purer joy in some far-off unconceived world of beauty and undreamed-of joy to come, as in some other life than our poor earth-pent souls can imagine or conceive, a felicity that we dare scarcely admit even into our thoughts—such is heaven, and such is love!

Who among men can draw the subtle distinction between perfect heaven and perfect love? Is not the one that here upon earth a foretaste or like some faint foreshadowing of what the other is in heaven?

It was something of this like upon which the old father of Marjorie Gillingham smiled, as

with halting tread and laboured breath he tottered onward, step by step along an easy descent of life towards the common end the common accomplishment of all men.

* * * * *

For this narrative it would be superfluous, it would be idle to mince matters, there is no object but to admit that, as Marjorie Gillingham's heart went forth in all its power, so there is no need to admit other than that Bertram Gonault loved Marjorie Gillingham with a passionate love. A love it seemed too sweet, too precious, too pure, too beautiful, either to be broken in upon, a thing too sacred either to be broken or to last, the passionate love of those two young hearts each to each of the inestimable worth of countless worlds.

I know how poor is language when we come to tell of the deepest phases of even human love, for what pen or tongue or measure can span its length, its breadth, its depth, its height,

when it soars as high as heaven is high, as wide as countless worlds, as deep as a thousand seas, whose floors are dotted with pearls as uncountable as the sand grains which fringe the endless reaches of their shores.

Who shall presume to intrude upon the hallowed sacredness of such a love !

CHAPTER VII.

SHADOWING GLOOM.

THE long long shadows of the tall forest trees, were falling longer and longer still, athwart the closely shaven lawn which in graceful undulations spread out like a carpet before the whole lawn or garden front, or what was called the "south garden front," of Vernwood mansion, which as yet was Captain and Marjorie Gillingham's beautiful home.

It was growing late on a summer's—one of our typical English summers—afternoon. The forms of the tall poplars, the majestic elms, the old gnarly oaks, with here and there the darker shadowy purple leaves of the copper beeches, or here and there the ever-tremorous foliage of the asp, threw wider and wider their still

lengthening shadows, as lower and lower the declining sun sank deeper and deeper down over the wooded horizon of the west.

Over the old brown stone façade of the mansion, the sculpture upon which was but sparsely ornate, the tendrils of an aged westeria tree, with its still luxurious abundance of graceful leaves and multitudinous clusters of pendant, delicately hued flowers, were ever climbing and ever interlacing themselves like some cunningly contrived network, wrought, and entangled, and knotted and interwoven, by nature's most deft and dexterous hand.

If such were needed, if such were possible, it seemed to add and impart still more to Vernwood of that magic aspect of home.

Every available door and window had been thrown widely open, that the interior might benefit from each stray breath of the warm and health-giving summer breeze, while three persons well known to us through the medium of the foregoing chapters, seemed to be reclin-

ing, or lounging idly, where they could most imbibe, and most luxuriate in, the balm and blessing of nature to the full.

Quite a little group of indoor chattels, consisting of odd occasional tables upon which were still scattered the remains and utensils of what fashion is pleased to term five o'clock tea, lounging chairs of exquisite beauty and curious make, and other household effects from within, had been carried out and accumulated, and stood or lay scattered here and there in the most elegant and unpremeditated confusion, over several square yards of the bright green sward.

Two of the three personalities best known to us, namely Marjorie Gillingham and Bertram Gonault, were reclining at an easy talking distance the one from the other on lounging chairs,—if chairs they were worthy to be called,—of that cunning handicraft and subtle mechanism, into which had been introduced the principles of engineering as if constructed by

some heathen Chinees, or other intellect schooled in mysterious combinations and forms, for surely no consistent Christian brain could have conceived furniture of such marvellously and curiously barbaric designs.

But as Marjorie Gillingham sat in one of these, surrounded by, I may say enveloped in, the voluminous clouds of her gauzy summer tire, decked out coyly here and there with ruddy bunching ribbon bows of brilliant hues, her young face radiant with the charm combined, of excitement of the flush of healthfulness of exquisite natural beauty which was hers, heightened and intensified by the overflow of happiness and the joyousness of youth, she looked like some picture, some fully coloured painting almost, over which the artist had shed an inexpressible colouring of light, such a model at once, of rustic and refined, and perfect loveliness, than an artist would have caught at were he in search of his ideal.

Apart from the two younger members of this

trio, on a seat which he had drawn up on to the broad flag-stones of a terrace, a seat of a somewhat more civilized and less fantastical make and shape, sat the old man Marjorie's father, isolated and alone, engaged in the dual occupation of reading a French novel, and simultaneously doing what had of late become his solace smoking a cigar.

The day had been one of the hottest of English summer days.

Around them, on every side, in the forest, in the water, in the air, there sported, and sang, and buzzed, and splashed, and carolled, almost every form, and every variety of British feathered, and finny, insect, and aquatic life.

Far and near, the distant woods, as well as adjacent shrubberies, rang ever clamorously and unceasingly, with the blithesome carols of innumerable birds, the warm bright air seemed teeming even to vitality, with the motion, and hum, and buzz, and whirr of a myriad forms of insect life, while even the very waters beneath,

seemed to vie with the firmament above, and the air around, with the splash, and splatter, and sportiveness of the scaled denizens of its translucent depths.

All nature seemed to be alert and glad, full of gleefulness and full of joy.

And yet with all this activity, with all this ecstasy, with all this abundant overflow of vernal aerial and aquatic life, with all this universal overflowing restlessness, with all this intensity of life, all nature—how shall we reconcile the seeming contradiction?—seemed to be at rest.

With all its fulness, with all its overflow of the vital principle, with its amorous gleesomeness, there seemed to brood over the face of nature a holy calm. In every breeze that woke an echo in the woods or shook a tremorous leaf upon a tree, there seemed to speak the voice Divine, that whispered, "Peace be still."

It was one of those summer days in which all nature seemed to be so full of life and love

as to impart and infuse its power and influence into the human heart. For how, when all the denizens of nature around us, lift up their hearts and voices in one unbroken strain of melody, how can the human heart resist the influence of nature, and refuse to render back the echo of the universal song, the orison of love, and praise, and joyousness and glee.

And seemingly the two young lovers as they sat there, for lovers (it would be idle to deny the fact) had Bertram Gonault and Marjorie Gillingham become, were infected by the influence of nature's universal strain.

It was the burden of the old old song that has to be again resung, it was the story of the old old tale as old as the everlasting hills, which has to be again and again retold with an interest ever fresh and ever new.

It was the tale of the youth and the maiden, which opens a new chapter, and begins a new page, with the beginning, the perfectionation, the opening, of every fresh young life, for Mar-

jorie Gillingham's heart was as fresh, and pure, and guileless, and unfettered, and free as the hearts of the birds which carolled around her beauteous and isolated woodland home.

She had been reared and grown, she had come to womanhood, not under the deleterious influences of heated rooms, the artificial hot-beds of a, shall we say unhealthy, social life, but her mind and body, both graceful and innocent and good, like as the petals of some bright flower its beauties had matured and unfolded amid all the freshness, and all the beauty, all the health-giving influences, all the wild romance of her perfect Anglo-Welsh home, surrounded daily and hourly by the humming of insects, the splashing of waters, the songs of gladsome birds, the falling of autumnal leaves, and the budding and development of spring-time flowers. And so it came to be, that when the pale handsome but yet refined face, and the graceful form of the young Bertram Gonault came to her, notwithstanding the

Americanised curiosities of his talk, on which Marjorie often twitted him with satirical railery, turning his "guessing" and "calculating" into jest, but I say notwithstanding this, the overflowing abundance of her young and unwooded heart had gone forth, and from her very soul she adored him with all the strength, and passion, and romance of her girlhood's first, and earliest, and most ardent love.

Nay all the surroundings of her and their lives seemed to fan and augment the flame.

There were long rambles together in the woods, there were long listless lazy afternoons, dallied away upon the lawn,—(for Bertram, although he never for an hour neglected the affairs of his newly acquired estate, attended to and got them mostly through in the earlier hours of the day). Then there were drives, or horse-back rides to distant villages and towns, and then they paddled together, and loitered in the toy skiff, or lingered by the tall beds of reeds, or toyed and trifled with the water lilies,

as the tiny boat rested upon the bosom of the broad lakelet which bounded the lawn, or laughed as they startled some timid waterfowl from its reedy lair.

It was a round of life for the two younger, which the elder of the trio looked upon with no disapprobatory eye,—it was a round of life which seemed to pacify and soothe the peevish querulous inclination of the declining years of the old man's life.

For Marjorie, he now seemed to see a future, for did he not love her with the deepest of a father's love?

Now there was a ready hand, and a strong arm waiting to protect his child when his own weakening arm should be for ever gone, when the few remaining years that in the course of nature he might count upon, had all been told.

Was not Marjorie the child of his age, was not she the repetition, the counterpart of one on whom he had once doted, on whom he had lavished his unbounded love, and of one who

perhaps had been taken from him even *because* he worshipped her, even *because* in his eyes she was the very goddess on whom his life had spent all its strength, and his devotion, all its worship, before whom he knelt, and to whom he paid the meed of devotion and adoration which he had given to her even before his true and very God.

It is such idols as these that death shatters with ruthless hand, and wrenches with cruel relentlessness from their throne in the human heart, and terrible, when we have to bear it, is the agony of dissolution.

True, Marjorie would have wealth, her own wealth, she was his only child too, and all that now was his would soon be hers. But what consolation was that to him! did it not lay her even more dangerously at the mercy of a designing world.

So had run the old man's thoughts, such had been his fears.

But now all that was changed. There was

a hand and arm strong above her, an arm stronger and more abiding than his own, not only so but Marjorie's would still be the old old home, the home in which together had passed so many many years of the father's and daughter's life, the home where she had grown to womanhood, the home where she had romped, and played, and rambled as a child.

Such were the old man's dreams.

But how cruel and thoughtless often seems to us the hand of fate! How inscrutable are its decrees! As inscrutable they seem to us as the visage of the Sphinx, which through countless generations, ever with unchanging and stony aspect, smiles almost mockingly at the vicissitudes of men.

As the two lovers sat there the day had faded almost into night.

Around them, one by one, the sounds of day (for the sun had gone down) had subsided into rest, and the evening shadows were fast closing over the woodland scene.

Away, high up in the mighty elms, the cawing of the rooks had ceased, and across the blackthorn, and the low-lying bramble bushes the blackbird's notes were no longer to be heard, while in the holly brake the thrush had trilled her latest evensong. But now and again, a nightingale with intermittent floods of richest melody, awoke the stillness of some secluded glen.

Above their heads, here and there from within the darkening canopy of heaven, the stars blinked shyly out of the profundity of illimitable blue, while the light mists arising from the meadows beneath, enveiled the bosom of the water in a half-transparent haze, from out of which the splashing rise of the spotted sided trout, or silvery grayling might be heard, or the gentle twitter of some night warbler among the sedge or reeds, or with jerky motion the moorhen piloted her fluffy brood across the stream.

Far away among the tall grass, down by the

course of the river, with mechanic uniformity of sound, the monotonous scraping of the land-rail fell continuously and gratingly, nay almost harshly upon the ear.

Surrounded by all these sounds of the closing night, Bertram still loitered and hovered about that presence, near which his love tempted him to linger, though from which his prudence prompted him to depart.

Somehow they seemed to be alone, for the old man, apparently mindful of the adage about two being company and three being none, had disappeared. And there seemed to steal over the two souls that happiness which neither could have told in words, and which neither needed that the other should have words to tell.

Bertram took in his the fair white hand which lay passively and unresistingly at Marjorie's side, but articulate speech seemed to them then an utterly superfluous, an utterly unnecessary power. Why was language given

to mortals when they themselves each to each were all in all, when without the utterance of words,—those too often hollow, deceitful, formal conventionalities of thought,—they,—those two lovers heart to heart, alone, spoke with an impassioned eloquence which Demosthenes himself had never reached in his highest flights of words.

With tender solicitude Bertram arranged a woollen cloud about her shoulders and then simultaneously, as if by the action of one heart and one mind, the two arose from their seats.

“I will go with you as far as the bridge love,” said Marjorie. They seemed to be for a long time the first words that she spoke.

But he protested, although he in heart desired it above all things, yet he would have her go direct indoors. He pleaded the night air, then he pleaded the damp grass. Then there was a pretty little tiff, one of your petty lovers’ quarrels in which “woman is wont to have her way,” and he, with his strong arm drew her

closely to him, and it would have been hard to tell in which of those two beings there was most of the child. Whether in her, with her weak trusting childish womanhood, so weak and yet so strong, in her very weakness so very strong, or in him, with his strong manhood so gentled by the strength of her weak womanhood, so subdued.

The wide lawn upon which they had been sitting, was bounded by the river which ran through the grounds, almost parallel with the south garden front of the mansion.

It was a river, widening in places almost to the broadness of a tiny lake or lakelet, hence in referring to it have we often in these pages used that word. The stream at its narrowest part was spanned by a marble bridge of Ionic design, over which a path led from the lawn, thence up a winding hilly road among the trees, to the Dower House—now Bertram's home.

The two lovers walked slowly in the direction of the Ionic bridge.

“And so I won’t go any farther than that,” said Marjorie playfully.

“And so she has a will of her own,” he laughed almost jestingly.

Then suddenly a shadow seemed to come over her. It seemed like some dark wave of sadness, which clouded the habitual happy sunny tenor of her life.

“Bertram,” she said suddenly, there seemed almost a determination in her tone as she spoke, —“Bertram—how long is this to last? How long may we trifle thus with love?”

“My love, my darling, your time is mine,” he answered. “There is no earthly reason why we should not be man and wife, man and wife made one, united in the sight of man, and by the will of God.”

Just then they reached the Ionic bridge. She looked up into his face, it seemed, as she nestled more closely to him, a look of ineffable love.

There was one long ardent embrace as they

said "Good-night" and the next minute she was gone—gone! And as Bertram lingered a minute gazing after the tripping fairy form, and then, as he turned away and walked slowly up the hill, the shadows fell around him!! The shadows fell around him!! Yea. The shadows fell around him!!! Verily how darkly can the shadows fall!!!!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BROKEN SPELL.

How transient are the gilded hopes, how deceptive and passing are the brightest promises with which we are often beguiled by the illusive semblances and pretences of this world.

How often and how surely fallacious and misleading are what we think, and what we call the certainties, upon which we are tempted and deluded by a false confidence to build our fondest hopes, to take as the very foundations, the very corner stones, of the happiness of our lives.

When we view it with the calm and dispassionate eye of experience and of wisdom, we can but perceive the limited scope of the circumvision of man, we can but perceive that

we wander in a vale of darkness and of tears, in which our eyes are blinded, our steps are prone to wander, our feet may err and stumble for lack of light.

Then let us thank Heaven that there has been shed across the gloom and darkness, across the religious and mental moral blindness of our race the bright illumination of a diviner light. Given that we only subdue our pride, and submit our steps to its guidance, we may survey with passive eye the tumults and disquietudes of those who become wrecked in an ocean of perplexities, and stranded on the sands of doubt.

These may be no pages wherein to moralize or philosophize, but when the circumstances of a life have to be written down, when its lights and shadows have to be traced out, when its sorrows and its brightnesses have to be portrayed, to be chronicled in the verbal colouring in the way in which it is the peculiar function of the novelist to perform, the writer can but

become impressed with, he can but endeavour to impart—with unskilled and 'prentice hand though it may be—certain of the cardinal truths which arise before him, and force themselves into prominence in his mind, and like landmarks with no uncertain significance, stand out from the depths of life like beacons looming over some dark sea,—set forth too obvious to be disregarded, too bright and heaven-sent to be set at nought, too applicable to all men to be misunderstood, and fool is he whose self-reliance and conceit prompts him to neglect their warning lights.

Life's lessons and life's teachings come to us oft in the guise of hard, incontrovertible facts, truths hard for us to digest, nevertheless needful for us to know.

But the teaching of life's mill which grinds so small, so very small, was a schooling which the young man whose energy and thoroughness had substantiated his claim, had re-established his paternal and ancestral rights, and whose

authority was felt over the beautiful demesne of Vernwood, had yet to undergo.

That out of the bright and silvern sky may burst a deluge which may engulph a life was what Bertram Gonault had to learn. Life's lesson was to be impressed upon him as if with a hand of iron, in words of fire, in characters of blood, to wreck his life, to destroy his body, perhaps to wreck and cast away his very soul.

As the heir of Vernwood awoke from his pillow on the day following that long afternoon, its pleasant recollection came rushing into his mind—I write pleasant,—but that is not the word, but I write it because in the language in which I am writing, in the vocabulary upon which I am drawing, there is not to be found, there has not been set down the word which tells adequately and fully the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of those two hearts' love.

As young Bertram Gonault awoke, as he unclosed his eyes from sleep, as he looked

around him on the light of another day, as there rushed in at the flood-gates of his memory the earliest morning tide of rational—or irrational—thought, he seemed to awake, to open his eyes, to look around him on to another and a different existence, on to what in his eyes was as another, and almost like unto a golden world, a world from which very much of what is life as we live life, all that is prosaic, all that is commonplace, had been eliminated and dispelled, banished as it were to some other sphere, and in its stead had arisen a world, gilded, brightened, glorified by a transcendent light, a life in which the turn of some marvellous kaleidoscope had changed, and retined for him the hue and colouring of all things, changed the aspect of life as if by the magic influence of some necromantic spell, as if there had been shed over it the potent influences of some magician's wand.

And yet it was not that nature around him was changed ; no, still the flowers bloomed, the

winds sighed, the sun arose and sank in the heavens gloriously, and gave to man, and beast, and earth, and trees, and woods, and skies, and flowers, his heat, and beneficence, and light; the birds carolled, the squirrels played, the waters in the rivulets sparkled, danced and sang, all nature laughed around him as of yore. But the spell and influence was one that had fallen over Bertram Gonault's life. In his eyes the Dower House was a fairy home,—and yet it was not that that was changed, for him each dew-drop was a crystal gem—and yet the dew-drops were but water distilled to perfect purity by the hand of God, for him each modest, blushing flower seemed a drooping pearl, and into all the prosaic trivialities of life was reflected what seemed the brightness of another sphere.

Thus it had come to pass that one woman's love and presence had shed a more than natural brightness, an almost more than terrestrial radiance over the young Bertram Gonault's life.

He submitted himself as usual, to the assiduous personal attentions of the young Jules Massey as his body-servant, but in a dreamy abstracted preoccupied mood.

He seemed almost too lost to himself to view the world about him with his usual eyes. The world of his affairs for once seemed to his imagination dwarfed into insignificance, or rather even to drop altogether out of his life. There seemed to be about him, to be ever hovering by him, a bright visionary presence which he could only see with unearthly eyes.

Having completed his toilet, Bertram dallied through the first meal of his day in the same absent-minded abstraction of thought; rather than eating, rather than its being any attempt at the recuperation of his physical life, it was a mere toying, a mere trifling with food, and then, having loitered about his home, doing some twenty things in general and on the whole accomplishing nothing at all, he sallied forth.

Again the summer morn was bursting forth with all its freshness, and all its fulness of vernal life ; there was the ever-sparkling ripple of the bright and laughing waters, there was the ever-dancing sunshine as it played and smiled amid the thick canopies of leaves, there was again the blithe and rapturous carol of the birds, there was the glad, bright freedom of the breezes, as they seemed to sport along the hill-sides or play hide-and-seek between the trees ; across the ethereal blue, in a firmament that seemed to have the brightness of heaven in Bertram's eyes, there floated great broken fragments of sunlit clouds.

His abstractedness notwithstanding, Bertram—lost lover that he was—saw and listened to and drank in, drank into his very soul, of the overflowing cup of nature which seemed around him, to be brimming over with the flood of life ; more than it had ever done before it seemed to fill his heart with its overflow of gladness, to infuse into his being all love and

peace, to permeate his spirit with the very breath of life.

Slowly he sauntered under the bright green archways of the overhanging trees, adown the hilly road. All thought of any decided or definite purpose seemed absent from him, for all consideration of his affairs, for the improvement of his material state seemed, for once, to drop out of his life, as a state of things unworthy of thought. One controlling influence seemed to pervade and permeate his life, one passion and one thought alone seemed to possess him.

Here and there as he wandered down the road, enclosed on either hand by the thick woods, scraps of the surrounding landscape were visible through the breaks and openings between the trees. At one point of vantage, from a turn in the road, the mansion with its surrounding and adjacent lawns and pleasancess came into view, nestling peacefully almost lovingly it seemed, in the valley beneath, while, sweeping broadly

past it, and following down the valley amid the winding tortuosities of the hills, dancing in the morning sunlight, there flowed the bright and sparkling reaches of the stream.

For a few minutes the young man lingered. He seemed arrested, fixed to the spot by the fairy picture-like beauty of the view ; it was like one of Turner's masterpieces ; it seemed to be infused by a supernal, a preternatural beauty ; there seemed to brood upon the landscape a warm, bright, but unnatural glow. Some peculiar atmospheric condition seemed to shorten, almost as if to cut off distances, like is sometimes the state of the atmosphere before a storm, to bring things unnaturally near, as it were almost to annihilate intervening space.

Bertram was arrested by the *coup d'œil*, and his own frame of mind rendered him peculiarly susceptible of fascination. But then, as he gazed, as if to heighten and intensify the fascination in his eyes, that the landscape might

not lack the figure which an artist would have painted into it to give it life, he could see in the distance, wandering slowly, pensively, it seemed, about the lawns, the figure of the reigning divinity of his being, the supreme goddess of his world. Marjorie!

His pulses seemed to throb more quickly at the sight. Through the far-off intervening distance, through the glorified sunlit morning haze, the valley called to mind some classic vale, and its divinity looked like the realization of Homeric verse.

The lover quickened his pace along down the steep road, until, right on the Ionic marble bridge which extending from the lawns, spanned here one of the narrower reaches of the stream, at the same place where so lovingly, so regretfully, so tenderly, they had parted the night before, Bertram and Marjorie again met.

He hastened forward to meet her.

With his lover's ardour his first impulse was

to clasp her to himself, but a strange something in her manner seemed to restrain him and keep his impetuosity at bay ; it was not that she was cold to him, not that she was even constrained, no ; but one glance of his quick sharp lover's eye, told him of a cloud. She looked not one whit less fresh, not one whit less lovely, not one whit less loving, than the day before, no, but there was an overshadowing which even he—even her lover—could not fathom or understand.

As she stood on the bridge waiting his approach, something that looked like a letter, caught by the fresh morning breeze as it rose from the surface of the water, fluttered to and fro in her hand.

And then she stepped a few paces quickly towards him.

“Bertram dear I must go to London,”—hardly stopping to acknowledge his salute, or return the pressure of his hand,—were the first words she spoke.

“To London love!” he ejaculated with unfeigned surprise. It seemed so uncommon an event for her whose entire life and love seemed to be always so confined, so completely centred in her beautiful rural home.

“Yes to London Bertie dear, I must go! St. Clare must be dying. Look at that!”

She held up to him between her thumb and finger a small plain diamond ring, through which was tied a knot of narrow pearly ribbon. Merely a simple plain circlet of gold was it, in which was set one tiny pure brilliant stone.

“Yes I gave her that long long ago, years ago; yes Bert love, before I ever saw, or heard, or thought of you, when I and Alice St. Clare were school girls together. We were fast friends then dear. That is, you know, fast friends as girls are friends when they are at school.

“Poor Alice! She was a devotee, a *religieuse*, and there was some great sin upon her conscience, some great weight upon her

mind, that she would not tell even to me, her bosom friend.

“ And so we parted, parted, vowing life-long friendship as school girls part ; I gave her that, and she said she would treasure it as a token, a keepsake, a treasure, but that I must never expect or hope to see her or it again, until we met in heaven,—or unless I came to her when dying, dying under the torture of an unfessed or unrequited sin, in that case if I received back my token she made me vow to hasten with all speed to her side.

“ And so I vowed. And here is the token come back to me again.”

“ Poor child ! ” mused Marjorie, as resting on her lover’s arm she gazed thoughtfully and musingly, very sadly, down over the marble balustrade of the bridge into the water beneath.

“ Poor silly child ! we parted as school friends, and she had sworn to abjure the world and give herself to God. I believe she joined some sisterhood. She renounced the world

although she was rich and beautiful, she was clever and accomplished too, and might have had the world at her feet."

Evidently a weight, a burthen of intense deep plaintive sadness, a sadness greater than she expressed, bowed Marjorie's spirit down at the revival of a girlhood's memory, resuscitated out of an almost forgotten past.

Bertram was puzzled and perplexed. Amid all their confidences, what Marjorie had just told him, opened out a new chapter of her life, which she had never till then shown or revealed even to him. Not that he believed that the episode had been intentionally withheld from him. No, it could not have been that. It must have been the sudden revival of a recollection which must have faded and passed, as it were, even out of Marjorie's own life, the love and friendship of a girlhood eclipsed by, absorbed in the deeper and stronger love of womanhood, just as the sickly and imperfect beams of our weak, puny, artificial modes of

illumination are eclipsed, and overpowered, and absorbed in the glorious advent and the incomparable refulgence of the rising sun.

Marjorie's lover had enough of intuition in him to know that it would be as easy to divert the course of the broad limpid stream which flowed beneath them with its silvery flow, as to turn a fully determined woman from the fulfilment of her plighted vow, on the accomplishment of which she was fully bent, so the next best thing he believed he could do was to aid her in rendering its accomplishment easy and safe.

"Then I will go with you to London," he said,— "if it must be so."

"No Bertie, you will not, I shall go alone."

There was no hesitancy, no half measures, no compromise, but only a stubborn, determined woman's unreasoning, unbendable wilfulness in her tone.

She was in one of those feminine moods that was not to be driven, not to be guided, not to

be led, but only determined to go blindly forward to what she believed to be the accomplishment of her intentions, the fulfilment of her vow.

“No Bertie,” she repeated in a decided tone, “you cannot go. I have ordered the carriage to be ready at two o’clock for F. to meet the train, and you can go with me as far as there, that is all.”

Then the two walked slowly towards the house, she leaning on his arm.

In the library there was a scene with the old man her father which it is needless that we should recount, but woman had her way.

At two o’clock that day Captain Gillingham’s carriage rolled away from Vernwood.

Although the summer had passed its prime, all nature around echoed with its sweetest music, and had decked itself in its loveliest garb of green, as those two lovers rolled through some of the loveliest scenery of the English shires.

But an unwonted silence, an unwonted sadness seemed to hang over them.

Full as their hearts might be the one to the other, all in all, the music of nature which rang in the outer world seemed to lack all responsive echoes in their hearts. Again and again did Bertram essay, by joke or repartee or conversational arts, to disperse and dispel the overhanging sadness, and to lay the demon of pervading gloom. But bright and free and joyous as was every item of surrounding life, those two hearts were overhung by an impenetrable cloud.

An hour's drive brought them to the town of F., and with the usual errands, the usual obsequious attention accorded in an English country town to the occupants of a carriage drawn by a pair, and then the usual bustle, and the usual confusion, and the usual adieus, and Marjorie Gillingham, all in all, worlds upon worlds as she was to her lover, became otherwise no more than one out of the thousands of passengers which daily mingle in one or

other of the great rivers of human traffic, which all converge, and all lead from one way or another, for rougher or for smoother, for better or for worse, into the great central ocean of metropolitan life, in which are swamped and buried or lost the hopes and longings of so many lives—lives which have departed on their voyage pennoned with so many high ambitions and so many gilded hopes no more to be realized than the deceptive *mirage* of the desert proves to the thirsting traveller to be a health and life-giving sea.

CHAPTER IX.

A SPIRIT DESOLATE.

IF, as they drove through those scenes of English rural beauty, there hung over those two lovers, over Marjorie Gillingham and the young Bertram Gonault, the damping cloud of sadness, of pervading melancholy, what shall we say of Bertram Gonault, as to the blankness of spirit, as surrounded by the comfort and luxury that wealth could purchase, he lounged back in Captain Gillingham's luxurious barouche on his return.

But how often,—or how seldom,—does luxury like the pure metal unalloyed, as rare as the rose that has no thorn, go hand in hand with complete content.

Notwithstanding that Bertram saw, or might

and should have looked upon, admired, with thankfulness of heart, appreciated all the beauties of an abounding nature around him, notwithstanding that he passed over the face of an earth which had given up to him of its wealth, for his delectation and enjoyment beyond his expectation, beyond his hopes, beyond the wildest fantasies of his most avaricious dreams. Notwithstanding that he luxuriated in all the comforts and enjoyments which that wealth brought with it, Bertram Gonault felt that all the brightness, all the joyousness, all the warmth had gone out of his life.

Alighting at Vernwood, it seemed almost as if he stepped into a world bereft of its sun. He encountered the old man moping about in social solitude,—if I may use so seemingly incongruous a phrase,—in a lost and dejected mood. Not till then had the passion-stricken lover comprehended how much the daughter's presence had infused warmth, and happiness,

and cherishment, and its measure of content into the aged father's life. Not till then had he known so fully, how ruthless he had been in stealing from the father the fulness of the daughter's love.

Then in hopes that the dark tide of his thoughts might be diverted, that the blank in his life might be in some measure forgotten, the heir of Vernwood threw himself anew into the affairs of his regained inheritance.

With the determination which was his characteristic, Bertram Gonault tore himself away from all the luxurious surroundings and seductions, into which it seemed he had almost too easily fallen, of carpeted rooms, trifling teas, and those long sunny summer afternoons, which long as they had been he remembered as now alas, but all too short! basking in the smiles of beauty on the shadowy lawn; and plunged body and spirit into the business of his estate, and the world of his affairs; inspecting the premises and woods, ordering as to

dilapidations which certainly needed his care, and superintending his mines, which seemed under the judicious management which had been set up, ever to be putting forth new and increased wealth and multiplying his store.

Then again, after some days of incessant work, the relapse came, and with it the desire to frequent again the haunts rendered to him sacred by the sweetest memories of his love.

Entering rather unexpectedly by the hall, Bertram found the old man Captain Gillingham, standing before one of the old armoured effigies, gazing up at its iron-bound visage, mumbling some disconnected ejaculations in complete absence, almost it seemed in a kind of semi-imbecility of mind, then at the sudden appearance of Bertram he shambled off into his room in a furtive, shuffling, evasive air, as if in a measure conscious of his own growing mental infirmity which he desired to conceal.

Then Bertram went where letters usually lay, for of course Marjorie, dropping the last

and smallest crumb of comfort and solace into her lover's heart, had said laughingly, that although she should be absent in the body, she would be present to her lover in the spirit, and she would do what all lovers do when they cannot kiss, she would write. And so one mail after another Bertram waited and waited, but no letter came.

At first of course he admitted, he allowed himself to believe in the usual remissness, in sickness, forgetfulness, counter attractions and the common causes of delay. But when a whole week had gone by and no communication came, the anxious lover began to think, and conjecture all manner of possible and impossible things.

Alone in the solitude of his bachelor quarters at the Dower House he took out and ruminated thoughtfully over the sheet of paper which Marjorie at their parting had thrust into his hand.

It was the same that she had displayed

to him as having received from her friend Alice St. Clare, and was stamped with an address near Eaton Square. The address was surmounted by a cross, and in large handwriting across the otherwise unspoiled sheet, might have been said to be scratched or scrawled rather than written, besides the address, the one solitary word "Come."

Again Bertram did what he had done twenty times before, he reproached himself for doing again and again—why did he allow her to go to London alone?

Then he recollected her self-willed obstinacy, and what could he have done?

Marjorie was by no means a stranger to the Metropolis,—she had passed in one of the suburbs years and years of her collegial life. Its streets, its life, its ways were as familiar to her as her country home.

As for old Captain Gillingham he became more morose, more taciturn, and more obstinate day by day.

Now Bertram would catch sight of him peering out through the conservatory, as if he expected to see Marjorie come trippingly along the garden path, in her broad sun hat, and the thin light drapery of her summer tire.

Another time would he be standing with one foot on the lowest step of the broad old oaken stairs, near the armour-clad effigies, and the carved oaken shields, listening attentively for a light airy footfall along the landing or down the stairs, or the rustle of the more elaborate dinner dress, or merry echo of the joyous silvery girlish laugh which he seemed to expect to hear as he thought she was descending to the hall—all sounds which never came. And then when she came not he would turn away with a disappointed dejected look upon his face—a look of longing, blank, despair.

On Bertram he seemed to glare with a kind of fierce dark angry menacing glare, as if the loss or absence of his daughter was a sin that he laid to her lover's charge.

More than once with a peremptory military show of command, he ordered the carriage for Miss Marjorie's use, then when the servants, knowing full well his puerile childish weakness, which they did their best to humour, and to show him their respect, would obey, he seemed lost, dazed and apparently powerless to comprehend why she did not appear. Then suddenly, as a momentary flash of the old light seemed to illuminate his mind, he would exclaim, "Oh! Yes I forgot." Then bracing himself up to a pitiable show of strength he would struggle into his fur-lined driving coat, step in and be driven away alone, but very soon to return—for he seemed ever to dread separation, to cling only to the memories of the past and his beautiful home.

As day after day brought no tidings or no letter from Marjorie, Bertram's wonderment and anxiety became ever more and more intense. Discuss the position of the affairs calmly with her father he could not. The old

man's mind, it was evident to Bertram, evident to all about him, was becoming daily more and more unhinged.

Then, when the lover could no longer endure the suspense, he rode off to the nearest telegraph station, some ten miles from Vernwood, and despatching a message to Marjorie at the address stamped on the paper she had given him, prepared himself to await the result.

He instructed the telegraph officials to retain any communication which might come for delivery at Vernwood, and waited hour after hour for some reply.

At last, late in the afternoon the reply came. Bertram's heart sank, his head felt dizzy, as he perused the five terse, ominous, ill-starred words—"Cannot be found." "Not known."

Bertram mused long over the message, again he repeated it, first backwards then forwards, as if that would alter its sense or relieve the whirling chaotic confusion of his brain. Then he did what may seem was a childish, nay, a

very weak and foolish thing. But men's, even strong men's hearts have odd and tender places, hence they do often odd and unaccountable things. Bertram's strained feelings, overcoming the weakened boundaries which a stronger manhood would have imposed, broke down, and he gave vent to the agony of his soul in tears, yes, hot, burning, childlike tears.

It was one of those strange unaccountable occurrences that are sometimes seen to happen, and sometimes happen to us in life, which no circumstances seem to account for, which no explanation seems to elucidate, which no amount of brain-racking seems to explain. Marjorie had had all that about her which could make life all that most men think desirable, and most women crave; what they slave for, what they scheme for, what they design for, that which they hope for in their fondest hopes, and that which they dream of in their most fantastic, most improbable dreams.

Hers had been a life in which its every-day realities were the fulfilment of other women's and other girls' ideals. A father who would not allow money to stand between her and her every caprice, or every whim, or every desire; a home and surroundings of a romantic beauty beyond the realization of a dream, and now had come to her in the young and comely and wealthy heir of Vernwood, the lineal and proven descendant of generations of ancestors, whose serene and placid visaged portraits, as daily she looked up at them, seemed to smile benignly down upon her from time-dimmed frames which hung along the galleries and corridors, and whose escutcheons she saw on every side blazoned in all the tinctures of heraldic art, on the glazed casements of her home, whose grim and armoured effigies grasped their tall lances, and whose drooping bannerets hung like some modest and faded emblems of bygone prowess, in the hall.

At the feet of Marjorie Gillingham fortune

seemed indeed to pour out all her bounties with unstinting and unfickle hand, and yet to the apprehensive mind of her lover, it looked, as he read those five short words, as if she had vanished out of life.

The place where the message came to him was the diocesan centre and a cathedral city. Bertram, in order that his childish ebullition might be unseen, left the busier streets and sought the dim and more peaceful seclusion of the cloisters, where he might vent the first outpourings of his soul alone, and within the shadows of the venerable pile.

To heal the broken-hearted, to calm the troubled spirit, to speak to the worn and weary soul the message of calm, and restfulness, and peace, such has ever been the church's quest, such has ever been the mission of religion in the world.

As Bertram Gonault stood or wandered there in the holy calm of the summer eventide, as his poor racked spirit longed and yearned

for a solace which it seemed beyond the power of the world to afford, from within the cathedral walls the tranquillizing music of the organ fell softly, sweetly on his ear.

Through a narrow Gothic door very near him he entered the sacred fane.

A gowned verger of benignant mien who stood within the portal seemed to invite him to devotion even without words.

Wonder overcoming grief, never had the young American been so deeply impressed. Here in one stupendous structure, reared and beautified by a thousand generations, the past and present seemed to unite and to meet as one. Around him the recumbent sculptures of mailed warriors rested on their time-worn marble tombs. Above him on the walls he read the epitaphs of the great and good, whose names still lived though they were dead.

A few worshippers, some devoutly kneeling others sitting pensively, were scattered irregularly about the nave of the stately fane,

while the timely softening or swelling of the organ seemed alternately to exalt, to lift the soul to heaven or to assuage its woes, now rolling forth like grand but subdued and distant thunder, now its soft sweet *tremolo* seeming to echo the music of a thousand rills.

Then, as the lengthening shadows of even-tide began to fall, the last rays of the sun stole through the mullioned windows, reflecting the hues of the memorial colourings and bathing the interior in floods of many-coloured light, till once again the organ swelled and the *vox-humanum* seemed to sing out like some ever-swelling tribute of angel song ; then relapsing into the softest sweetest *pianissimo*, the sweet weird music seemed to lose its very self, to die away in the infinite and far far distance of some other and unknown sphere.

By the strange weird influence of the music as it fell upon his troubled spirit in the closing day, by the near proximity around him of those grim sculptured mail-clad warriors recumbent

on their time-worn marble tombs, as if by the power of some invisible mysterious spell, Bertram felt as though enchained to the spot even when the latest shadow had fallen, and the last echoes of *diapason tremolo* and *vox-humanum* had died away.

Throughout the vast and vaulted interior of the fane there seemed to reign that holy and peaceful calm which his troubled spirit craved.

One by one the few scattered worshippers rose from their seats and filed past him down the aisle, until last of all two female figures who had been kneeling near the lectern arose, and they too came by him down the aisle.

Both evidently young, they were similarly attired in the distinctive garb or uniform of some religious or charitable sisterhood, their weeds and thick closely drawn veils being insufficient to conceal their youthful carriage, and the youthful, even girlish, contour of their forms.

A strange fascination, a kind of strange

strong attraction which even he himself could not comprehend, seemed to affect the young man Bertram Gonault as he watched the trim figures file demurely past him, and then out into the waning light of the summer evening they passed out of the glorious fane.

Drawn by an influence notwithstanding himself, the young American rose from his seat and followed. He passed out into the Cathedral Close, but mysterious as it appeared to him, the two fair worshippers were nowhere to be seen.

For half an hour he loitered about the vicinity, but nothing transpired to reward his patience, to relieve his curiosity, or to compensate him for his zeal.

That night Bertram returned to Vernwood, but perhaps did we so desire, had we the space at disposal, it would be well to drop the veil before Bertram Gonault's thoughts and hopes and fears for that night.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.

THE day following that on which Bertram Gonault had despatched and received the telegraphic message to and from London—or rather it would be nearer the truth of the case to say, the day on which he failed to receive any tidings from London such as he might have expected and desired, or the day on which the great blank had been made into a greater blank in his life,—the evening of which he sat in the cathedral into the waning twilight, watching the setting sun's rays, as longer and longer they stole so silently through the tinted panes into the grand old fane, throwing their softly coloured shadows across the tombs of those old recumbent sculptured warriors, or kissing as

if in adoration the brazen altar cross, or bathing the marble columns of the stately fabric in a flood of golden glory, or rested on the consecrated floor, his soul at once bowed down to the very earth in its agony, but lifted up, transported almost as if to heaven in the sweetness and grandeur of the organ's strains.

It was on the day following this, that, without approaching nearer than his own cottage to Vernwood mansion,—without imparting to any living human being either his destination, his intentions, his apprehensions, his hopes or his fears, Bertram left his home.

It was late in the afternoon of that same day, that he landed at the London terminus of the line of rail which conveys passengers from far-off country homes in many of the western English shires.

The shadows of yet another day were just falling as he stepped from the train of railway cars into the great weird hum and buzz of London life, a life, when we come to analyze it,

so full of the joys and tears, of the ambitions and wrecks and triumphs of life.

The English metropolis had subsided from the business of its working day, and after the customary hour or two of neutral time, when the great city had subsided from the activity of its day, and awakened with a like, or almost intenser activity, into the more fervid energy and dissipation of its night, it was in those hours when the London world throws its usual energy neither into its work nor into its play, the two or three hours' subsidence in the mighty pulse of life, before society and aristocracy had begun to eat its dinners and after mediocrity had drunk its teas. It was just about this time that Bertram stood alone—(that is as alone as a man can be, which is sometimes very much alone indeed—when surrounded by a bustling, hurrying, scurrying, crowd)—on the terminal platform of the said line of rail.

With no greater delay than the exigencies of nineteenth century travel demand, he secured

a vehicle and ordered the driver to put him down in any part of Eaton Square, and in a few minutes the vehicle was rattling rapidly through the stately West End London streets which seemed to echo as if with the unwelcome intrusion of noisy wheels. Then passing on quickly out across the Bayswater Road then through the broad drives and avenues of Hyde Park, Jehu at length drew rein and came to a dead standstill somewhere near the middle of Eaton Square. There Bertram Gonault alighted, paid the man as liberally as, when circumstances admitted, he did everything else, and on foot continued his quest.

One or two inquiries induced him to turn his face westward, and he kept on rapidly with quick anxious nervous steps till turning to his right, and again referring to the address which Marjorie had given him, he found himself at the junction of some three or four thoroughfares at the end of Chesham Street near what is now known as Lyall Place.

Almost like a sacred atmosphere, as of a superior race who could afford to dispense with any connection with the turmoil of busy life seemed to reign around in the whole locality. Who, thought Bertram, could be the livers in those great houses? his heart throbbed, his hopes arose in expectancy. Was he so soon again to draw to him the lithe young form which he so wildly and yet so tenderly loved; loved with a passion beyond the expression of words. Was she, was Marjorie now even near him. Ah, poor lover!

Again aided by the dim gaslight in the gloaming he read the street, the number, the house where she was to have gone, and then at last he felt sure he stood before the door.

It was one of those high houses, of which there are thousands in the West End of London, which agents describe as "suited to the requirements of a family of position," but devoid of all idea either of poetry romance or art, a great, plain, painted, many-windowed, *façade*.

All this cold plain want of ornamentation we need not linger to describe.

But what sent an indescribable thrill, a kind of horror of disappointment through Bertram's mind, was that from almost every window in the house, the common ordinary black and white handbills, stared him conspicuously in the face, telling "as plain as whisper in the ear" in Tom Hood's inimitable words, certainly not that "the place was haunted" but that the house was "to let" and "void."

I said a painful thrill of horror ran through Bertram Gonault's mind, it was that and it was more, it was a kind of wild frenzied despair, a terrible dread, a confirming of his worst and darkest and most secret fears.

The young man sprang up the broad stone steps to the door, seizing the bell handle, pulled it with the energy of fading hope, almost with the energy of despair. The sonorous echoes came loudly back through the deserted rooms

and passages with a hollow empty clanging sound, as if the abode was the hollow sepulchre, the empty charnel house, and it echoed the death-knell of his fondest hopes, of his heart's desire. But although he waited no other response came.

Then he turned and asked questions of one or two loungers and passers-by in the street, some knew nothing, others hurried on past him as if they knew and cared less, others shook their heads, evidently knowing nothing at all.

Then, with leisurely measured tread, a tall constable came by on duty, on his round, and the young American,—I say American because Bertram was still comparatively American or foreign to all the ins and outs of English life,—addressed himself to him.

“Sort of a nunnery there last, I think,” replied the tall, helmeted custodian of the Peace, as he looked up at the blank and uncleaned windows, giving no sign either of ornamentation, or habitation, or internal life, but only of empti-

ness and desolation. Then as the shadows of night had now fallen, the constable turned his lamp full on to the bill and read :—

“To be let—or the lease of this valuable mansion to be sold.

Apply to Messrs. Markham and Neville,
No.—, George Street,

Westminster.”

And that was all the helmeted custodian could tell. So as there was nothing more that could be done that night, thanking the constable for his civility, Bertram in dejected dispirited downcast mood walked away.

Of course he was, to use slang, “floored,” “baffled,” speaking nautically “on his beam ends,” “completely at sea.” He knew neither what to hope for or what to fear, and yet there seemed to pervade him an indescribable dread, a dread, a suspicion, that his life’s happiness was for ever wrecked and shattered, that his idol had for ever fallen, and notwithstanding the vast advantage he had won, that

a dark shadow which neither wealth, nor time could efface, or dissipate, or overcome, might be settling, might indeed have already settled over the exceeding brightness of his life.

Such is one of life's lessons that we have to learn, we are none of us safe, none of us exempt from the castigations of adversity, no not one! we may plume ourselves, we may heap up riches and say I am strong, then comes to us the trial that is greater than our greatest strength, and we have to succumb.

The next day Bertram was at the office of Messrs. Markham and Neville in George Street, Westminster, betimes, on an errand of inquiry respecting the valuable town mansion No. —, ——— Street, Eaton Square.

He was received with all the courtesy and consideration due to an applicant, and possible tenant of an occupation of the size of the house No. — Street, Eaton Square. "Yes the price of the lease was £500, the rent £175 a year," and Messrs. Markham and Neville as agents for

the property were acting for the trustees of the "Confraternity of the Holy Cross."

"Had the mansion been long vacant?" Bertram asked.

"No, sir, only about two weeks," was the suave agent's reply.

"For what purpose had it been used by the 'Confraternity of the Holy Cross'?"

Well, the suave agent thought the Order was a wealthy community, and they had used it as some kind of town refuge, merely as an offshoot, or an auxiliary branch to some larger establishment elsewhere, but for some reasons best known to themselves they had altered or abandoned their original plans, that was what the suave agent had been informed, and that was all that he could tell. "I have never," continued the agreeable agent, smiling almost sweetly as he said it, "I have never been admitted into the secret conclaves, I have never been initiated into the rites of the 'Confraternity of the Holy Cross,' what are their tenets,

what are their aims, what is their *raison d'être* those who have been initiated into its mysteries and they alone know," for he believed the Confraternity was occult, nay almost Jesuitical in its operations.

The suave agent admitted only that he was a plain business man, interested in doing his best both for his clients and himself, on business terms.

This was all Bertram could ascertain, and so the interview came to an end, and the suave agent very politely bowed Bertram into the street.

Following the counsel of Mr. Lumley, whose astuteness he had already found so much to his advantage, Bertram next found himself in a small office in a small rectangular court off Whitehall.

Although surrounded by a wealth which it would tax the powers of an accomplished arithmetician to compute, although within an arrow's flight of precincts, not "where merchants most

do congregate" but where statesmen and ambassadors, princes, peers, and kings, meet, and assemble, discuss, and pass, and bow, yet the office where, following Mr. Lumley's suggestion and advice, Bertram Gonault found himself, would probably not have commanded more than the unpretentious rent of £25 a year. How very unpretentious that must be, those who have dealt in or contracted to pay metropolitan rents best know. Arrived here Bertram, acting on the advice of Mr. Lumley, sat and poured out the overflowing cup of his woes into the sympathetic ear of one whose acquaintance as Doctor Sirius Wells we shall defer till a later stage of our tale.

CHAPTER XI.

IS HE MAD ?

THE bleak autumnal winds blew wildly across the Vernwood hills.

The summer with all its warmth, with all its vitality had gone. The harvest had been reaped, the sheaves had been carried, the golden store had been garnered in.

In place of summer lustre, and autumnal sadness, an air of desolation rested upon the wind-stricken woods and fields.

Here and there, except where the bright dark leaves of the holly shone in the weaker sunlight, or the clinging tendrils of the ivy festooned from the stronger trees, sear and yellow leaves hung on to their denuded parental branches as if for very life.

Summer, we said, had died away, and there seemed to have departed from the soul of nature the overflowing breath of life.

With the approaching signs of winter, there filled too, the hearts of some whose histories and affairs intertwine so closely with our narrative, a desolation, the depths and darkness of which we cannot depict in words. For Vernwood there seemed as if there had faded out of it the very sun of its life; as if there had come upon it a cloud, which quelled its gladness, overshadowed its brightness, neutralized its surpassing beauty, and enshrouded its daily existence as if in some funereal canopy of impenetrable gloom.

Bertram Gonault, who hitherto has most conspicuously figured in the foregoing chapters, became each day an altered man. To those who knew him best, it was plain that, notwithstanding his material prosperity, the desolation of his spirit was day by day undoing his physical frame, to those who

regarded him, knew him as he had been, and now knew him as he was, there rankled in his bosom the canker of a hopeless despond, there gnawed the worm of a despair that dieth not, and there burned and smouldered the fire that is not quenched.

The daily tasks and duties which he personally undertook were performed in a lost abstractedness of mood. Unerring as might have been the business faculty within him, it was evident that in every action, in the performance of every duty of his life, his thoughts wandered far away, far into some vague indefinite unknown; that notwithstanding his growing wealth, his—to himself at least—was a miserable, nay a blasted life.

As for the old man, Marjorie's father, week by week he seemed to be sinking, as it were, dropping out of life.

As these pages are designed more to entertain, to brighten, rather than to harrow up the darkest recesses of the soul, we will refrain

from depicting here all the hopes and fears, the successive lights and shadows, the darker hours and the brighter sunstreaks, which swept across his darkening mind, lights and clouds which passed across his mental vision like the fleeting cloudlets which sweep athwart the face of a spring-day sky.

During these long, black, dreary days Bertram Gonault wandered about as one lost.

Then at last, for the old man, the end came ; the silver cord was loosed, the sun of another long day kissed the horizon, and he passed quietly away out of life, sinking as a watery and tearful sun which reaches the horizon bereft of its glory, its refulgence quelled by tempest dulled by storms.

We will not lift, or if only for a moment draw aside the veil nor intrude into the sanctity of the darkened room, for the shadows had fallen when his spirit passed away to rest !

Almost alone Bertram stood by the couch of death, for where was the gentle hand that

could have most smoothed the pillow of the dying, where was the face that could have lightened and alleviated the dark passage of the soul? Again and again he asked for his daughter, his darling, but where was the absent child?

And so he sank, passed away let us hope to where regrets are unknown, and where there is not a care.

Then there came the few dark solemn days of watching, through which the soulless body waits only on sufferance within the woe-stricken dwelling of its former state.

And then they bore all that remained of him away. Out of the hall where the grim old armoured effigies almost seemed mournfully to lower their tall pennoned lances over the bier of the dead, out across the lawn with its tall bare leafless trees, where in all their freshness and beauty he had spent the summer days, over the Ionic marble bridge where in its beauty it spanned the broad clear stream, on

which the lovers toyed and trifled in happy evening hours, up the hilly wooded road, by the woodbine archway, where the Dower House nestled in among the trees, then on upward where instead of summer zephyrs, the chill winds shook the oaks, and sang and whistled inharmonious music through the gaunt and naked branches of the trees, till near the wild hill top, where in the groves, the tall lank beeches bowed their heads, and the sombre solemn yew trees cast their funereal shadows on the graves, where avenues of cypress seemed to watch the dead, and—fit emblems of mortality,—the fallen autumn leaves lay thickly scattered on the ground, in the mausoleum vaults, where rested the bones of those old knights whose armour stood and rusted in the hall, among Bertram's own ancestry, there they put him down to rest.

And so Bertram, almost a solitary mourner, returned, returned almost alone to the blank silence of his home over which there seemed

to have settled a gloom almost deeper, almost more oppressive than the gloom of death, in which there seemed to be felt the absence of a joy almost greater than the absence of life.

The spring, the summer, the autumn, passed, the winter came, the cold winds blew, and the great white snowflakes came whirling through the gusty air.

With all his accumulating wealth Bertram Gonault's seemed like a ruined life. Other men in his circumstances might have tossed it lightly off, but not so the young heir of Vernwood Bertram Gonault, his affections seemed to be of that strong kind, which cannot so lightly forget their earliest, truest, only, love.

He might have indulged in the sports and pleasures of the social life within his easy reach, for of course the reappearance of a proven rightful heir to Vernwood, his shrewd conduct of his affairs, his phenomenal prosperity, and his fame, went forth through all the country side.

But like many master minds, like those who seem to stand mentally, if I may so express it, a head and shoulders above their fellows, Bertram Gonault had his idiocrasies, and now that all life's brightness seemed to have been extinguished, departed from him, his existence day by day became more and more almost that of a recluse.

Burying himself in the wooded seclusion of the Dower House, with Jules Massey as his almost sole companion or attendant, or wandering in a spiritless dejected mood down to the mansion, roaming through the deserted shrubberies, or haunting, almost like some spirit, the now darkened and tenantless rooms.

Then alone he would stride up the broad oaken, carpeted, stairs, and his solitary footfall would echo along the corridors, and he would reverently steal almost with the dread of seeing some ghostly ancestral form start up before him, as his disordered fancy would conjure up

the distorted impossibilities of a racked and weakened mind, or he would glance up fearfully, almost expecting to see the courtly ruffled figures in the portraits that smiled so placidly and benignly on him, step out from their tarnished frames.

Then he would steal almost devoutly along to the little corner room that was known as "*hers*," a kind of sanctum or boudoir, whence, through the diamond glazed casements, over the balcony, in happy days, she looked out upon the woods and trees and flowers; where she painted, or read, or worked, or played, and where, by his imperative commands, everything awaited untouched—not even a speck of dust had been removed—all awaited the long long day of her return.

There, now drooping and withered, lay the bouquet which she had gathered and arranged when in all its summer freshness with her own hands, there by the harp unstrung lay the last songs she had sung, there the music of the

last melodies she had played. There were the painted flowers, and everywhere the hundred trivialities commonly so conspicuous by their absence, in almost any other state, which a true pure woman knows so intuitively how to dispose and how to display.

There were all these things, but the actual presence, the actual divinity which created and shed around itself, as a halo, the spirit and the charm, was gone, gone!

Then as the gloomy stormy autumn days rolled past, and there opened, nay there even seemed to smile, a brighter newer year with its vain vague hopes of betterment, Bertram's mental condition somewhat changed, changed from that brooding, boding, despondent, melancholy, with now and then an intervening ray of hope to an even blanker wilder more furious despair.

Where any clue, or any promise, or any hope of Marjorie Gillingham's whereabouts appeared, or even glimmered, his wealth was poured out

like water, and counting that wealth against his passion, it was only in his eyes as the veriest dross.

But the lavishment of his passion, and his madness, and his wealth, all seemed alike fruitless, all alike vain, for there seemed to envelop the strange, mysterious fact of her disappearance, of her vanishment, a veil which no professional acumen could penetrate, no sagacity which his money could purchase or employ could fathom.

Then gradually, week by week, day by day, nay almost hour by hour, he felt stealing upon him what others could not perceive. They saw the paling, haggard cheek, they saw the gloom-stricken downcast air, they saw the dejected mien, but they saw not that which, vampire like, was hovering over him, gaining possession of him day by day; they saw not that which he felt, that internal conviction of mental aberration which he came to know only too plainly, and only too surely, as if by some fatal intuition

was coming over him, gaining upon him hour by hour.

Then he wandered aimlessly away from Vernwood, recking not, wotting not, scarce heeding, scarce knowing which way his footsteps led, and solitary, alone—not even Jules Massey near him—moped about many English towns, caring nought for their characteristics and beauties, heedless of their lions, but always yearning for something which he was conscious was for ever and for ever lost.

At length a visit to London found Bertram in the ante-chamber of a great specialist on cerebral affections, seeking the advice of a great authority on disorders of the brain.

The verdict of the eminent specialist, couched in the scientific phraseology of his profession, was short, unambiguous, definite and decisive beyond all misconception or shadow of doubt. “ Unless strong curative measures, in the shape of total change of scene, circumstances and mode of life were adopted instantaneously,

complete—probably chronic—mental aberration must supervene.” In other words this meant unmistakably, that unless Bertram took immediate change he would go permanently and irrecoverably mad.

Mental afflictions are perhaps felt and known first by those whom they threaten, and the verdict was one which Bertram himself perhaps best foreknew.

Pocketing an enormous fee, the great physician of minds rang his bell, and Bertram, by a tall powdered attendant in resplendent livery, was bowed out obsequiously into the square.

Mad! Mad! Bertram Gonault a raving maniac! Mad! permanently mad! Whatever might have been his silent mental convictions, his dreamings, the horrible terrible words grated, dinned, resounded, in his ears.

He stood on the pavement of the fashionable London square, deeply absorbed in thought; from that hour, certainly, if not in the sense predicted by the eminent mental specialist for

whose opinion he had just paid that enormous fee, Bertram Gonault must have gone mad.

Delegating the personal management of his estates at Vernwood to subordinates (in the selection of his subordinates Bertram seemed ever almost as if favoured by luck), the heir again turned his back on his beautiful, but in his eyes now desolated ancestral home, with all its beauty, with all its freshness, with all its innocent enjoyments of rural English life.

He did what many heirs before him had done, he discarded all that a dozen generations of his race had bequeathed to him, and done for him, to plunge madly, headlong, wildly into the vortex of the fatal, terrible *maelstrom* of what is called pleasure, of what is called life.

In the London world, where visitations of cometic and exceptional brilliancy are almost yearly seen to soar like rockets in the social sky, to shine for a time in social space, then die out and disappear, leaving nothing but a crash, a wreck of *débris* or sparks, or only

smoke to tell that they have been; in that world Bertram Gonault astonished even those accustomed to view such brilliant meteoric flights by the exceptional splendour of his displays. To particularize these in detail would take far beyond the limits of our space. His various receptions and reunions became known as the most costly and extravagantly conducted in the west end of town, his riparian picnics and water parties were the most sumptuous and enjoyable along the banks of the Thames, his dinners were the most expensive and *recherché* of any given either within or outside the clubs, his stud and teams were unsurpassed, almost unequalled by any in the Row or in the Park. All that which the world called its pleasures, Bertram Gonault supplied to the world for its delectation, for the enjoyment of others, with unstinting hand.

Whether he himself enjoyed, or whether there gnawed at his heart the worm that dieth not,—whether there still burned within his very

soul the fire that is not quenched ? Whether the agony of his desolation pursued him,—dogged him with relentless persecution ? These are questions which scarcely dare we ask ; or whether in the few silent solitary moments which fell to him out of the din of life, there did not start up, there did not stare him in the face the grim and horrid spectre of his despair.

Men looked at each other and asked (for Bertram Gonault did not entertain upon unpaid bills or the credit of some afterwards to be forgotten day, no, his liabilities were met punctually, even generously, as the days came round), men asked each other, whence comes where-with all this is paid ?

Report and gossip even went so far as to assert that the newly appeared heir to the old Vernwood property and stock had struck upon his Welsh property rich and inexhaustible veins of gold.

Gossip in this, as gossip generally does, asserted something that was false as well as

something that was true. Some hinted that the apparently limitless wealth which he squandered was the proceeds of some gigantic Anglo-American fraud.

His friendship became the target and ambition of those social free lances, the money-lenders, the bookmakers, the parasites which exist on the doubtful border-land of society, and comprise its fringe and its refuse and scum, who gloat on the ruin and pillage of the necessitous, and distend their foul carcasses by devouring the crop of verdant youth which, as surely as the years come round, spring up and sport for a time on the surface of London social life.

Had it not been that in the bowels of that barren and worthless looking Vernwood earth, the present heir had discovered, and had the wit to turn to its best account, the rich deposits which for ages had lain hidden beneath its ground, and waiting only to enrich him. Had he not discovered that which his ancestors,

Lawrence Gonault and Hubert Gonault, had failed to find, or been too thoughtless or too careless to utilize, what in its richness in ore, was almost tantamount to the discovery, by him, of the philosopher's stone, Bertram Gonault, like his father Hubert Gonault had done before him, Bertram would again and again have been compelled to flee the country in debt and disgrace.

Nor were his excesses confined to one capital, or one country, or one society alone.

At Rome he became conspicuous as the mad American whose freaks of extraordinary extravagance became the talk, and the amusement, and the scandal of both native and foreign community ; while, on the Corso, his servants and retainers appeared in liveries, the grotesqueness of which revived mediæval splendours, or seemed an attempt at the quaint uniforms of the Vatican.

At Monte Carlo, Homburg, and some of the German Spas, where all Europe seems to

assemble to minister in gambling hells to the worst passions of humanity, there Bertram Gonault spent fortune after fortune of any ordinary man over the insane vow to "break the bank," a promise which many madmen both before and since his time had sworn to accomplish and failed to perform.

At Paris daily in the Bois de Boulogne his teams were the envy and admiration of the connoisseurs in equine beauty.

In such forms as these did the madness—for truly he had done nothing less than gone mad—of Bertram Gonault vent itself, to the amusement, or pleasure, or profit of an army of parasites, who followed in the wake of his cometic splendour with the pertinacity of a pack of hungry wolves, or swarmed around him like vampires thirsting for his gold.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PANGS OF REMORSE.

SUCH had been Bertram Gonault's life as he had to look back upon it from the bed upon which he lay when we first introduced the shattered wreck of manhood to the reader in the opening pages of this tale. For to him at last the day of satiation—shall we say the day of contrition?—came, as it must come to each and all of us; for that which we sow or plant or borrow or take, that must we reap or repay or return, nay, if we do but sow the wind even the whirlwind shall be our reward.

And so to Bertram Gonault the day of reckoning came.

The world and all that it could offer had paled and sickened in his eyes. He beheld

his excesses in all their naked deformity. He saw the hollow emptiness of the phantom which for all these ten or fifteen years of his life he had pursued. He saw how unsatisfying, how unworthy was the cult of pleasure which verily he had almost worshipped as his god.

There has been a time in the life's history of each and all of us when we take our first step out of the direct and narrow way. That that first false step in our pilgrimage is taken full early God knows. All, every one of us, come into this world equally innocent and equally good, equally sinless; vessels equally perfect from the Maker's hand. But all of us have not wandered equally soon or equally far astray. We hear of blessings in disguise! but do not oftener curses, the devil's fish-hooks, come to us in the deceptive guise of blessings? Did not Bertram Gonault's inheritance, his wealth, his millions, become his stumbling-block which brought him where he lay? Did not Bertram Gonault estimate at their true

worth the value of his riches then? There was no anchor of hope left to him to cling to then, as life seemed ebbing away, as the strands in the weakened cable which held him to it were parting one by one.

And so to Vernwood, where, in the last twelve or fifteen years, he had spent perhaps not more than twice as many months, he came back he almost feared, nay, almost hoped, to die. For what had existence, what had life left in it that he could enjoy? Of the cup of its deceitful pleasures he had imbibed to the very dregs, drank deeply till their taste was to him as gall.

The fulness of that true pure happiness of domestic life, which might have saved both his body and his soul, was the one thing which had vanished beyond his reach.

Even of the good the full desire is not to be granted here; such seems the inscrutable and universal law.

Although we have intimated that Bertram occupied the mansion, yet it would be truer to

say that he occupied a single room. In what we may call its state apartments, silence and darkness, and dust, and desolation reigned supreme, and out of all his revenues he lived merely like a lodger, in a style and at a rate of expenditure for his personal needs, which almost any labourer or any miner on his estate could have paid.

At first he spent his days in moody solitude, was taciturn and morose, then came a step downwards, one more parting lurch of the wreck, wreck of body and wreck of mind ; the mind seemingly ever haunted by some vision, some hallucination of a shadowy jewelled hand ever before his eyes, at which as he gazed, he raved and shrank from, and cowered at, in the most abject fear, or stared wildly at from his bed whence now he never rose.

Even those who might have administered to him, might have brought comfort to him, even the parasites and sycophants that ever hang on to a rich man, even these he had driven

from him. Jules Massey alone, his fidelity immovable, stood by his friend and master,—or rather I should say, was suffered to stand by him; even unto death, even till the end should come.

And thus the two were together in the midnight solemnity of the darkened room.

Then with tired, worn look the sick man paused in his delirious raving, and held his breath to listen to some fancied sound from without.

“Massey, was not the sound of a horse’s tread upon the coach road?” he asked.

“No Mas’r, think not,” answered his servant in an evasive tone, for he knew his patient only too well, and he thought his own quick ear would have detected any unusual sound.

“Yes yes, it must be! Go again to the terrace Massey and listen, Lumley must have come, certainly, surely he must.”

Jules Massey again did as he was ordered,

and again passed out into the pale, clear light of the August moon.

Higher and higher in the heavens rose the great full orb, her refulgence seemed to bathe the matchless landscape in a flood of subdued and blushing glory. The reigning silence of the night was impressive and supreme.

Then suddenly there fell upon Jules Massey's ear a subtle uneasy rustle of foliage. Whence it came he wist not. It seemed but as the midnight tremor of the aspen leaves as they shivered upon the parent boughs in a passing breath from heaven.

Jules stood silent and motionless, listening in the midnight stillness as we say "with all his ears." But still once more the unbroken silence reigned.

Then suddenly, as if startled from its rest, a pheasant fluttered noisily from one of the trees upon the lawn, and flying away on whirring wing was lost to sight and sound in some far-off woodland brae.

At that moment a cry of bodily or mental agony louder than common from the sick man's chamber recalled Jules Massey quickly to the sufferer's bedside.

The delirium was very strong upon him, and he was sitting upright, cowering back and recoiling apparently in the utmost terror from some imaginary, moving object before his eyes, evidently palpable to him but unseen to other eyes.

For the hundredth time Jules Massey followed the direction of his finger and his wild gaze. But Massey saw nothing save the old oak panelling or the heavy dark upholstery which shadowed the room.

For several minutes did this wild fit of terror possess him, racking the poor sufferer's already weakened frame. Then it passed off, and he seemed to regain a little of consciousness.

Jules Massey seized the opportunity afforded by the lucid interval to smooth the sufferer's pillow, to offer nourishment, and administer a

soothing draught in the hopes that it would induce repose.

But although he lay there quieted and somewhat tranquillized for a time, his wide-open eyes were fixed on the dark face which bent so pityingly over him.

"Massey! How goes the night?" he asked, this time in a quieter and more rational tone.

The coloured man drew from his waistcoat pocket a large gold repeater.

"Mas'r, it is within fifteen minutes of one o'clock," he replied.

"And old Lumley should have been here at the latest by ten," added Bertram, still maintaining his transient interval of consciousness. "You told him in the telegram that the train should arrive at Vernwood Village at nine?"

"That is so, Mas'r!"

"Then why isn't he here?"

All the reply that Massey made was to shake his head mournfully.

Again there was a silent pause!

“Jules! How long would it take you to go to Vernwood Village? to ride there, of course I mean?” asked the invalid.

“Vernwood Village, Mas'r? Me ride to Vernwood Village to-night? Then how about you? What d'ye think would become of you if I rode to Vernwood Village?” and there played over his black visage a smile of contempt, of pity not untinctured with a touch of scorn.

“But supposing I *order* you, Massey, supposing I say you *shall* go to Vernwood Village, what then?”

To this argument Massey made no response.

For a while he paced to and fro, up and down the room sorrowfully as if in thought. Then he passed from the sick room into the adjoining study, from which as already described one might step through the low French window out on to the terrace, and thence to the extensive lawns and pleasure grounds which stretched far away on every side.

The study was a luxuriously appointed room, that one room out of the many wherein everything had been arranged to minister to the millionaire's convenience or comfort, or personal gratification, when in his days of activity and health.

Who were to occupy those rooms when he was gone? when the hand of death had finally closed its grasp, when the silver cord was loosed and the golden bowl was broken, when he had been carried forth, whose laugh would echo thoughtlessly in those now tenantless halls, whose bairns would romp and revel in those rooms, then as forgetful and as disregardful of the late Bertram Gonault as of a leaf that has fallen, or of a flower that has bloomed and withered, or of a breeze that has blown? Who would enjoy all his wealth? These were questions which Bertram Gonault asked himself with a troubled spirit.

In the full confidence, the full assurance of health, procrastination and procrastination had

fooled him, deceived him, lured him on to delay. To-morrow would be soon enough, the tempter said, and now there had overtaken him a day in the which, with him, with Bertram Gonault, no to-morrow might ever come.

Thus it was that Mr. Lumley had been hurriedly summoned from London, from the quiet routine of his office in the vicinity of Lincoln's Inn Fields, to the lawns and bowers of Vernwood on an errand of such sadness withal, as the disposition of all its owner's wealth.

For half an hour Jules Massey sat in a luxurious study chair before a blazing fire which he had kept alight for his own comfort as well as that he might, when needed, minister to the requirements of the sick-room.

As Massey sat there in thought no sound reached him, until, little by little, the regular and peaceful breathing of the sick man coming to him from the adjacent chamber, told the watcher that the narcotic which he had ad-

ministered was taking its usual effect, and that the patient had at last sunk into a peaceful repose.

It was not the first time that Jules had given his patient the draught, the prescription of Bertram's attendant physician, and its effect had always been to throw the sufferer into some hours of refreshing sleep.

Then it was that Jules Massey rose quietly from his chair and crept softly to the bedside of his master. Having mentally convinced himself that the sleep which he was enjoying was of that natural and refreshing kind from which he always woke renewed, as it were, for a fresh struggle against the haunting mental demon of his oppressing hallucination, and from which in all likelihood he would not wake till the later hours of the morning, Jules gave one last look at the sleeper, closed noiselessly the sick chamber door, then donning his hat, stepped again through the French casement, out into the cold clear brightness of the silver moon.

He hesitated for a moment only upon the terrace, then stepping down on to the gravel walk or carriage drive which led from the lawns, and winding away through dense thickets of underwood and tall forest trees towards the entrance lodge by which the estate and grounds of Vernwood were reached from the direction of Vernwood Village.

Hard by this entrance stood the cottage or lodge of the gate-keeper, David Blackman, a functionary who combined in one personality the dual offices of gate-keeper and landscape gardener on the Vernwood estate. The cottage which had been erected in the reign of the present owner of Vernwood was built after the rustic model of an Alpine Châlet, and stood some three hundred yards fully from the mansion, on the Vernwood Village road.

As Jules Massey came along the winding drive through the woodlands, within sight of the Châlet, he noticed that the gate leading to the road stood open, a circumstance which,

although he remarked to himself as unusual, caused him no great surprise. Probably David, knowing something of an expected arrival from Vernwood station, had purposely left it open for the night. Still this seemed hardly likely. The circumstance passed from Massey's mind however as he found himself standing immediately in front of the Châlet.

After repeated knockings, the gate-keeper, David, was aroused from his sleep, and appeared at an upper window of the Châlet in a state of semi-attire.

Jules Massey quietly requested him to come down, then waited on the drive below. Soon there was an unbarring and unbolting of doors, and in a state of temper not the most amiable, the gate-keeper appeared, and approached Jules as he stood in the middle of the drive, then glancing in the direction of the wide-open gate an expression of surprise escaped his lips.

"Have you been through that gate?" he asked Massey.

“No! why?”

“Well, I left it shut when I went to bed, to that I could swear. How is he? Is he worse?” asked the gardener with a searching mysterious look into the black face.

Jules might have been observed in the moonlight to shake his head, but he made no other or audible reply.

“David, I want you to go to Vernwood Village,” he said, a moment later.

There was a peculiarity in Massey’s tone that David did not comprehend, a ring of sadness, a choking sound as if something had stuck in Jules’ throat, as he seemed half with difficulty to bring out the words.

David looked closely again into the ebon visage of his fellow-servant, but it betrayed less of the emotions which were working beneath it than as if that visage had been of the ordinary European hue.

“Go to Vernwood!—go to Vernwood Village this time o’ night! what for?”

“David, there must be no ‘what for’ about it, but you must go! You can take Ranger from the stable and ride there if you like, but you must go to Vernwood Village and Vernwood Station and try and make out whether the nine o’clock train was stopped there last night, and if any gent for here arrived from town. The lawyer was telegraphed for to come and settle up his affairs, and my b’lief the sooner the better it’s done.”

There was an air of mysteriousness in Massey’s tone which seemed to quell David Blackman’s curiosity, and prompt him to an unquestioning obedience, or rather acquiescence, in the course of action proposed.

Besides, Jules was, and ever had been, the mouthpiece, almost the second self of his master, and his presence seemed ever to be encircled with an areola of authority, like a halo, which only the direct emanation from the seat of supreme power could assume. It was, however, with the air of a man who goes un-

willingly about what he is obliged to undertake, that David accompanied Jules to the stables in an ill and unamiable mood.

The horse, Ranger, was saddled, then as noiselessly as possible led forth; and after a few more words with Jules Massey, David, being no great horseman, clambered awkwardly on to the animal's back and rode away.

When David on Ranger left the stable yard he rode out into the carriage drive, the way which had just been pursued by Jules Massey, and which was connected with the entrance to the stables by a bye-road. Then keeping the horse as much as possible on the turf, he urged him into a rapid trot, passing his own cottage or chalet, out into the high road where the whole vicinity was overhung with a thickly umbrageous growth of tall leafy trees.

He had passed his own house only by some fifty yards, when suddenly Ranger came to a stand; his nostrils became distended, his eyes

strained, and his mouth foamed as if in the presence of some terror.

David looked about him, but nothing was visible to him ; then, with a sharp cut from the hazel switch which the rider held in his hand, the horse, overcoming all sense of fear or danger, sprang forward like an arrow from a bow.

What was known as Vernwood Village, consisted of a cluster of houses, hardly worthy, as far as population went, of being called a village at all. What population there was had flourished or languished from time immemorial, as the fortunes of the estate of Vernwood rose or fell.

Although its commerce was of a most limited kind, that had happened to Vernwood which happened to many other English estates when the railway fever was at its height ; the owners of Vernwood possessed sufficient local influence to practically compel, either by bribery or coercion, not only a railway to be engineered pretty much as they desired, but the erection

of a station and the stoppage of trains was timed very much as they pleased.

Thus it was that the London lawyer, Mr. Lumley, summoned hurriedly to Vernwood, must come by the train by which both the master of Vernwood and Jules Massey expected him to arrive.

A ride of some two miles in the moonlight brought David to the little station of Vernwood Village.

Scarcely a light was visible in any of the adjacent dwellings, the dwellers in which were evidently enjoying their soundest hours of repose. Then he walked Ranger up to the station itself in the hope of learning from headquarters the information which he sought.

The aspect of Vernwood Station, even by day, was none of the liveliest; one or two green and rustic young porters, and an elder functionary, who officiated as station-master, porter, factotum, and head clerk, made up the complete staff. But as David approached the spot in

those small hours, there was no sound or stir of human life.

To return to Vernwood as wise as he came was no part of the sturdy Welshman's intent. After having himself been aroused out of his night's sleep, he experienced some mental solace in the fact that he could now revenge on another that inconvenience which Jules Massey had inflicted upon himself.

So, after a due examination of the precincts of the little station, he rode up to an adjacent dwelling, and as he sat on Ranger's back began to strike one of the upper windows with his whip, till from certain sounds proceeding from within he had the sweet satisfaction of believing that his wrong had been avenged.

Then the upper window opened, and with certain uncomplimentary invectives and incivilities, the functionary, who commonly paraded in fustian, brass buttons and corduroy, for once made himself visible to the naked eye in his undress suit.

“ I wants to know where the nine o'clock train stopped here, and at what time ? ” asked David, who had not yet acquired a perfectly grammatical mastery of the English tongue.

“ Then if yer wants to know why can't yer come in proper time to harsk ! and not break the public's night's rest by coming at the unharthly 'our. No, the nine o'clock train did not stop here ; ” and with that the upper chamber window closed with a slam, thus leaving the still further angered David and Ranger figuratively and literally out in the cold.

“ You go and be ——,” ejaculated David. But this unamiable anathema the man in the warm, luckily for David, did not hear, and the anathema was lost upon the midnight air.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLOODY HAND.

AFTER Jules Massey had accompanied David to the stables, and helped him to saddle Ranger, and then when he heard the clatter of the horse's hoofs in the distance, now every minute coming to him fainter and fainter as the distance increased between them through the stillness of the summer night, the black-faced servitor drew a deep sigh of relief at the temporary relief he was enjoying from his long close night watches at the bedside of his master and his charge.

As Jules stood there alone in the solitude and stillness of the night his eye turned thoughtfully heavenward.

A few stars—but not the innumerable host

often visible from our earth—twinkled in the illimitable blue. Now and again thin fleecy fragments of cloudlet,—for the night was very calm,—floated, almost lazily it seemed, athwart the disc, now risen higher and brighter in the heavens of the great broad-faced silvery harvest moon, and as she shed her light upon the landscape he revelled mentally in the all-pervading, all-absorbing and exquisite tranquillity of the night.

Then Jules drew from the inside pocket of his coat a cigar-case of silver, richly and elaborately embossed, and with the critical eye of a connoisseur, selected therefrom a choice foreign cigar.

Then as the fragrant fumes of the weed circled upward and around him, suffusing and commingling its fragrance with the cool fresh midnight air, he plumed himself in his conceit.

A massive gold chain hung across his stomach, upon his long and slender black finger the facets of a large and costly brilliant sparkled in

the rays of the moon, while the frequent flourish of his handkerchief of fine white cambric, rendered his presence redolent with the scent of an exquisite perfume, of which the enravishing sweetness seemed to outvie the fragrance of the summer flowers.

Such little personal accessories as these will indicate Jules Massey's apparent estimate of himself at this epoch of his career.

But the negro born, and especially the negro polished, educated, and refined by contact with life of a higher social grade, when he does affect the dandy, will simply out-Herod Herod in the degree of coxcombry which he can assume.

After having lit his cigar, Jules still lingered in the stable yard where David and Ranger had left him, till the intervening distance had taken the horse's hoof-steps on the distant hard high road to Vernwood Village completely out of sound. Then, admiring himself as he went, Jules strolled out on to the long, broad sweep of

the carriage drive which formed the road from the front of the mansion at his right, through the well kept lawns and grounds, past the entrance to the stable yard where he stood, and thence through the plantations which lay to his left, passing David's chalet-shaped cottage by the lodge entrance, and out into the country beyond.

Having reached the carriage drive, he drew his large gold repeater from his pocket, and thinking he might allow himself at least another quarter of an hour's release from duty, instead of returning immediately to his post, with a jaunty self-satisfied air he sauntered down the drive in the direction opposite to the mansion towards the chalet, where as already explained it stood near by the entrance to the lawns and grounds, overshadowed by the abundant foliage of the tall and stately trees.

Arrived thus at what he considered was the limit of his walk, Jules Massey stood still a moment intending to return.

As he did so, however, his attention was arrested by some unusual disturbance which was taking place in the immediate vicinity of David's cottage, and a moment later his eye fell upon a huge watch dog, which was commonly tethered to his kennel, standing about midway between the cottage and the lodge gate, by a long chain.

The animal was of the breed of St. Bernard, of uncommon size and beauty, and which Bertram Gonault had secured in some of his Swiss ramblings ; a choice selection, actually whelped at the Monastery, and was such a specimen of his kind as only the resources of a millionaire can commonly secure ; for verily, even the holy monks of St. Bernard are not impervious when the devil gilds his shaft or baits his hook with a golden lure.

“ Monk,” as Bertram had christened the ponderous, large-limbed whelp, had been brought into England at a tender age, under the fostering and particular charge of Jules Massey, and

there naturally had grown up between the two aliens, between the man and the dog, the one from the hot rice fields of Virginia, the other from Alpine snows, a something like mutual fraternal affection and regard.

Jules, on catching sight of his four-footed friend near the *châlet*, walked up to him, caressed the huge leonine head, at the same time calling him by name, "Monk, poor, good old Monk!" and using such other friendly modes of salutation as we often address to a dog.

The majestic beast gave a single wave of his plume-like tail, and with a short quick look of recognition into the black face of his human friend, greeted him with an expressive whine, and with such a look as in a human being we should call a smile.

But mankind is said to be the only one of God's creatures created capable of genuine laughter, so I suppose it would not be admissible to say that "Monk" actually did smile.

However that may be, as the dog "Monk" looked up into the man Jules Massey's face, the latter remarked that some uncommon cause of agitation was deeply exercising, if I may so say, his canine mind.

In the semi-darkness semi-light caused by the dense surrounding foliage of the trees, the dog's eyes seemed to burn with anger, appearing in the gloom like two lurid balls of fire. Then he ran to and fro the extreme length of his iron tether, uttering again and again from the profoundest depths of his capacious throat, repeated, low-toned, angry growls. Then back again into his house he rushed.

The canine displeasure of this monarch among dogs seemed to be excited and stirred to its veriest depths, till finally as the climax of his anger, as if he could endure no longer what he felt, placing his great fore paws on the sloping roof of his kennel, he threw back his huge head and, giving vent to his over-boiling wrath, poured forth his outraged feelings in

one dismal, long-drawn, melancholy howl, which made the dark human bystander's blood run cold.

Jules Massey, as he stood by smoking his choice weed, watched the extraordinary movements of his canine friend with a puzzled look of curiosity and surprise; for although, as far as human language went the dog was dumb, yet Jules was always firmly impressed with the conviction that "Monk" was endued with an intelligence which was little if anything short of human.

That Monk could think in his own way Jules felt quite sure; as to talking, Jules said he often did, and had his education been commenced early enough in that direction, Jules believed, and had always maintained strongly, that Monk could have been taught to read.

It was now, however, abundantly plain that something unusual had disturbed Monk's dog-gish mind.

Many, or most persons, under the circum-

stances; would have unchained the dog and allowed him to scour and range through the adjacent plantations and pleasure grounds in search of whatever, if any, might be the cause which so strongly excited his ire.

But Jules Massey did not do this, no! for, as he watched the strange unaccountable movements of the brute, he himself seemed, little by little, to become unhinged, not quite his usual self-satisfied, self-complacent self.

Little by little his own mind seemed to become like as if it were infected by the uneasiness which so disturbed the dog, and a vague sense of some impending evil, little by little, stole over him, and got the better of his innate, deep-seated self-conceit; for, in all his travels and all his experience of the world, Jules Massey had not yet fully mastered, he had not yet completely laid the uncanny bogey of an inherent superstition which possessed his mind. The howl of a dog, the croak of a raven, the peculiar flight of a bird, were "omens" in his

mind of impending catastrophe. The doctrine of "bad signs" held as fully possession of the superstitious mind of the negro-born Jules Massey, as they would of the most weak-minded, hare-brained parlour-maid or cook.

Superstition of this kind is the mark of an imperfectly tutored intellect, whether that intellect be that of innocent, trusting childhood, or the perverser ignorance of riper years.

Alas, we have to take life much as we find it, and battle with its opposing occurrences much as they come. It is no part of human economy, that, by the dark light of "omens," we should peer into a future which is not for us to know, and whose recesses, by all the poor light that we can throw into them, are only thereby rendered more dark, more unfathomable, still more obscure. We can but go right on; we can but do our duty and leave the rest to God.

These were not exactly Jules Massey's sentiments. He was not low, but he looked lower,

and took a lower view of life than this. He was not ignorant, but his intelligence had not risen superior to superstition, and a strong belief in the bogey world. He had not learned to take the highest view that it is given to man to take of the operations of the spiritual life.

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And so, as Jules stood there smoking his cigar, and attentively watching the movements of the dog, there ran through his brain a rapid cogitation on the doctrine of omens and signs. He felt too a trifle uneasy, nay almost a little guilty and regretful that he had left, even for one moment, his sick and sleeping master's side. Yet the next minute he excused himself; he absolved himself from blame. He had watched many weary, many uninterrupted hours; he had watched with all the tenderness and assiduity and solicitude of a female nurse. Indeed what made his watch fall all the more heavily upon him, Bertram Gonault, by his

taciturnity and peremptory treatment of all who came near him in his sickness, had driven almost all other attendants from his presence.

The black face and familiar figure of Jules Massey had been about him so many years that almost any other seemed unendurable in his sight. Massey seemed to Bertram almost like his inalienable counterpart ; almost as a part of himself, a follower almost more faithful, more certain to be ever near him than his own shadow.

So by indulging in this short half-hour of relief, Jules Massey had but small difficulty in persuading himself that he had committed no very grievous sin.

Then he tried, by coaxing and caresses, and by gentle words, to pacify the unquietness of the dog. But the more Jules endeavoured to pacify him, the more excited and unmanageable did the great creature become.

The lodge gate, near which the dog was

tethered, was a good part of a quarter of a mile from the room, facing on to the lawn, and on a level therewith, where he had left his master, apparently composed in a deep, refreshing sleep, and Jules felt in much doubt whether he should wait longer, and endeavour to ascertain what might be the real cause of the restlessness of Monk, or whether he should go directly back to his post.

To all human comprehension there was nothing near the dog to cause alarm. The calm and peaceful moonlight streamed down through the unruffled canopy of green, or shone refulgent through the wide openings between the tall trees, and over the landscape there rested on the woods and hills and fields a peacefulness supreme.

At last Jules Massey threw away from him what remained of the choice Cabana which he had been smoking, and leaving the great dog to himself, started off at a moderately rapid pace to return to where he had left his master, Ber-

tram Gonault, wrapped to all appearance in his refreshing repose.

A few minutes' walk brought him out of the darker umbrage of the plantations which grew round about the châlet, out into the full, clear moonlight of the broader reaches of the lawns.

Far away, over the broad carpet-bed of closely mown grass, the dew drops sparkled in the moonshine like gems of pure transparent light. The moon-beams seemed to kiss the ever rolling river, to play on the still waters of the now silent fountains, and to glisten upon the tall chaste groups of marble statuary which stood out picturesquely in unsullied and surpassing purity on the parterres and lawns, like some ghostly apparitions of the night.

Although the resplendent king of day—the sun, had sunk for hours from view, and was illuminating other spheres and other hemispheres, perhaps other worlds, yet it was one

of those nights of which we are apt to speak as being as light as day.

Jules passed the entrance to the stable-yard, whence less than half an hour before he had despatched David and Ranger on their errand to Vernwood Station and Vernwood Village; then a bold rounding sweep in the carriage drive, along which he was walking, brought the front of the mansion, now nearly a hundred yards from him, and with it the door leading on to the terrace and lawn, from the suite of rooms all on the same ground level with the lawn, occupied by Bertram Gonault, full into view.

The first thing which attracted his attention was that he could distinguish enough through the moonlight to see that the door was partially open, and when he came out he recollected distinctly that he had left it carefully closed.

But his master, Bertram Gonault, in the weakened, collapsed, nay almost dying state

that he was ; had he got up from his bed and gone out ?

But this seemed to Massey almost an impossibility, a mental suggestion entirely beyond his belief.

Could the door have been blown open by a gust of wind ?

No ; the night was one of unruffled stillness ; to all human perception there seemed not so much as a breath that would have caused the quivering of an aspen leaf.

Rapidly, as his own uneasiness seemed to grow and grow upon him at every step, he quickened his already rapid pace, then across the broad flag stones of the terrace he strode, through the French casement into the room adjoining that in which his master slept, and where he had sat a weary watcher alone, or listening only to the sick man's ravings so many, many tiring hours.

At a glance he saw that nothing had been touched ; everything remained as he had left it.

The fire flickered peacefully upon the hearth, the lamp stood burning on the table, the few books and papers which he had been perusing to while away his weary vigil, lay by the chair in which he had sat.

The next door, too, which he had carefully and noiselessly closed when leaving, that was also open, and an instant later he was in his master's room.

And there Jules Massey utterly collapsed.

His brain flew into a mad, dizzy whirl at what he saw ; there arose in his stomach a sickness as if he had swallowed something of the most horrid and revolting food ; he stood spell-bound, as if rivetted to the very ground ; for, across the bed where he had left his master sleeping, there lay Bertram Gonault, or the remains of what Bertram Gonault once had been—dead ! What little clothes he had worn when sleeping, half-cut, half-torn from his body, while the erst spotless napery on which he had been lying was one confused, disordered mass,

deluged, drenched, and sodden with the dead man's gore.

The remains of what had once been a living, moving, speaking man, endued with reason and understanding, capable of thought and feeling and action, lay lifeless, his body mutilated almost beyond recognition, across the bed on which he had so lately slept.

The head, with its ghastly face upturned, hung over the bed-side, while one lifeless arm and hand had fallen almost to touch the ground, down which there chased and trickled away a continuous stream, the warm, red, seething flow, dripping, dripping, dripping, on to the costly carpet of his room, trickling, growing, accumulating into one great red pool, wider and wider, spreading and stealing over the floor, that flood of what had been the flow of a dead man's life, his blood, the river which half an hour before had been coursing through his veins, making his heart to beat, making his pulses to throb, had been the motive power of

life within his physical frame, had imparted what was left to him of manly power.

The work of the assassin's hand, the terrible butchery which had been perpetrated seemed beyond the power of words. I can compare it only in its method to one of those White-chapel tragedies of which the calm, cool thoroughness of the butchery shocked, revolted, stirred to its very depths, from land to land, as far as the English tongue is spoken, as far as English sympathies are left, and further still, the whole civilized world. But let us not particularise the horrid details of the scene.

We have said before in this chapter that the mind of the negro-born Jules Massey was not sufficiently educated and elevated by training and culture to be above all the haunting fears of superstition, and all the vague, cloudy phantoms which, in the baser imagination, nay, and not in the baser alone, are believed to haunt and people the spirit world.

The profound and cultured philosopher, or

the deist is apt to see in death naught but a cessation of life; to him too often the great eternity which lies beyond is as a sealed book or an untold tale. This may be a belief which strips death of half his pains and half its triumph, eternity of half its fears.

But the mind of Jules Massey, when he came sufficiently to himself to feel sensible that he had any mind at all, arose to no such flights as these.

Apart from the horrid, revolting, sickening spectacle of blood, there was the great haunting spirit of the slayer—Death: which seemed to chill and paralyze the motions of his very soul, to fill him with a dread over and above and beyond the horrid spectacle of blood, to bring him into what was nearer than the closest communion with the spirit-haunted world. And then, fear overcoming every other power with which he was endued, Jules Massey turned on his heels and ran; he ran as never till that night fear had given him the winged speed.

Out of the chamber of death, out into the light of the clear, pale, sinking moon, across the broad flagstone terrace, across the broad well-rolled gravel drive, across the dew-bespangled lawn, Jules Massey fled, fled he knew not whither, fled as till then he had never flown.

At length, from sheer want of breath, and from sheer physical exhaustion, a ray of his mental presence returned, and he stopped short.

When he had eyes and thought to see and comprehend, he saw he was on a part of the lawn near the plantations, within view of the entrance to the stable-yard; and just then the sound of a horse's feet reached him through the trees, and a minute later his eye fell on David Blackman on Ranger just returning from their errand, coming trotting along the drive.

David almost as quickly caught sight of Jules, and turned the horse he was riding off the hard carriage road on to the springy turf.

As he did so, Jules Massey stood swaying his body to and fro, ejaculating, "O Lord! O

Lord!" while he held his head tightly between his two hands, as if he was afraid his head would break off from his body. Indeed, at that moment, Jules Massey felt that if his head could have taken unto itself like a cherub, wings without body, and could have fled away, he could have given up the salvation of his very soul.

At the sight of the abject and pitiable condition of his black fellow-servant, David Blackman quickly dismounted from the horse's back, and giving him a cut across his hind quarters with his switch, Ranger required no further persuasion to throw his heels high in the air and scamper off alone and unguided into the stable-yard.

As David approached Jules, the latter was still in the same collapsed and miserable condition of soul, and all he seemed capable of doing was to cry continually, "O Lord! O Lord!"

"For heaven's sake what has happened?" asked David as he approached.

“ O Lord ! he’s dead ! he’s dead ! he’s dead ! ” was all that Jules could say.

“ Dead ? dead ? who’s dead ? ”

“ He’s dead, he’s dead, Mas’r’s dead, Mas’r’s dead, Mas’r’s murdered, O Lord ! O Lord ! ” and Jules again swayed to and fro his body in the cruel and excruciating agony of his soul.

Without uttering another word, David Blackman, leaving Jules in his depths of spiritual and mental agony, walked across the lawn to the rooms which he knew had been occupied by his late master. He entered *sans* ceremony, *sans* scruple, *sans* fear ; and then, too, David looked upon that horrible deed of blood, that horrible spectacle of death !

For any human being not to have been sickened at the terrible sight would have been to be braced with iron nerves.

There the poor body of Bertram Gonault lay, butchered as if by the hand of some past master of the murderous art ; butchered seemingly to take away his life only, and seemingly

for that alone. The lamps still stood calmly burning as Jules Massey had left them upon the tables of the sick man's chamber and the adjoining room; a valuable gold repeater lay conspicuously within easy reach, even the sapphire ring remained upon the dead man's finger, money and other valuables lay carelessly near at hand, not a thing had been removed, the murderer had neither left a trace of himself behind, nor apparently had he taken with him a trace of his deed away, only—and only that alone—there was the frightful deed of blood.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FINGER OF SCORN.

It seems a marvel of mercy that the sins of earth are not visited on man with the instant castigation of heaven. And this seems a confirmation of the truth that this earth is not the place and state of final punishment or reward.

The sun of another summer's day rose bright and unclouded over Vernwood, notwithstanding that there had fallen upon its beauteous demesne the dark dark shadow of so stupendous a crime.

The mists of morning arose and dispersed from meadows and lawns, the fogs lifted from the broad bright stream.

Of course the bad news flew from tongue to tongue, from house to house, from village

to village, from man to man, with a speed which all our appliances for the captivation of electricity could scarcely outstrip or excel.

The day had scarce begun when women and men might be seen, with anxious serious faces, hurrying from the many distant hamlets and villages and the outlying parts of the Vernwood demesne, to learn the details of the horrible tale. There were labourers and rough miners, and at every house and every cottage door might be seen groups and knots of men and women talking excitedly and seriously, with strained eager faces, in hurried and mysterious tones.

The great pillar of the house had fallen, the hand was still in death which afforded them and their little ones their daily bread.

Then came also soon from greater distances, small farmers and tradesmen riding up on rough country horses, or rough ponies, or in all sorts and conditions of vehicles on wheels, men who directly or indirectly had prospered

under his rule, and thriven on his bounty, all come to hear to know to learn for themselves the truth of the often repeated tale.

Long before nine o'clock, there drove into the grounds the superintendent of the local constabulary, in a well-horsed and well-appointed trap, accompanied by some of his men, while other members of his force were soon seen arriving on foot from off their rural night beats. Till by ten o'clock, quite a crowd of people of all sorts and conditions and sexes, both young and old, of poor and rich, of rugged and refined, were scattered, some in groups, some singly, some in twos or threes, all over the grounds and lawns. All were discussing with the same alarmed and the same eager, terror-stricken air the facts of the terrible deed.

And they asked each other, before all, whose was the hand that could have wrought so dark, and so silent, so deadly a shedding of blood.

Close before the door of that suite of apartments,—leading on to the terrace,—wherein the

dead man lay, two tall constables kept jealous and constant guard, while before the darkened rooms, out on the lawn, attracted by that morbid unhealthy craving for the contemplation of all the repulsive surroundings of crime, were drawn together a little knot of women, untidy degraded poverty-stricken drink-besotten women, and bedraggled looking children, the scum of the local humanity, if I may so say, seeking to sate their craving for the horrible by gazing at the outside walls behind which the poor mangled corpse lay.

Then came fussy local magistrates and magnates in more pretentious carriages, and some on stout cobs, all hungry and thirsty for details, scarcely less eager than their lower brothers or sisters, with that unhealthy appetite for the revolting minutiae of the deed.

But most often of all, the most frequently asked question was, who in that short half-hour, during which Jules Massey said he was absent from his master's room, who could have perpe-

trated, committed, who could have carried out so complete a crime?

The majority asserted that no human hand could have done it in that short half-hour when Jules Massey was away.

Then came the logical inference that Jules Massey could not have been absent the whole of that fatal half-hour from his master's room.

Where Jules Massey was during that half-hour there was no one to tell. Could he have spoken, Monk could have told, but Monk, had not a human tongue.

Then again, why had Jules come at that hour of the night and dispatched David Blackman to Vernwood Village? David was the only male servant within reach, and yet Jules Massey had deliberately come, awoke him in the small hours of the morning, and sent him on an errand which the crowd said was a wild-goose-chase, and which would for an hour or two at least, take him far away out of sight and sound.

Such was the prevailing run of questions, and the pervading tone among the numerous motley assemblage who had collected that bright morning to contemplate that dark sin.

When the world takes upon itself to judge our actions its verdict is arrived at in much the same style as a little boy does his sums of addition and subtraction when at school; a rough and ready cast, or a rough and ready deduction is taken of our apparent acts, the result is hurriedly set down with but small examination of the factors of which it is composed. The sum may be far from right, but by this sum total of the world's opinion we are acquitted or condemned.

On the darkened morning of his life of which we are writing it was before such a rough and ready self-constituted court of common opinion as this, that poor Jules Massey was being tried.

But where was Jules Massey during all this time, when his name and his fair fame were being bandied about like a shuttlecock from

mouth to mouth, from man to man? Had he fled? No! Through all the hours of that long, wearying dragging morning poor Jules Massey remained in David Blackman's cottage, prostrate, stricken down, overwhelmed, overcome by the fearful shock which had felled him as if to the very earth, yea into the very dust, and by the fearful shadow which seemed so threateningly to loom upon his life.

For most of the time he lay prostrate on a bed, or sitting up, his head resting on his hands, he moaned deeply and piteously in the bitter anguish of his soul.

David Blackman's better half, with the true feeling, the heart and true mission of woman in the world, whether towards the guilty or the innocent, whether towards the black man or the white, whether towards the flattered or despised or bond or free, in solacing the afflicted and distressed, administered what consolation she could to the poor rent spirit and broken lacerated heart.

It was in the midst of Mrs. Blackman's ministrations to poor Jules Massey that a knock came at the chalet door, and the good woman, on answering the summons was startled to see standing before her, in his straight peaked cap and uniform, the tall dignified figure of the superintendent of the local police.

Standing back out in the carriage way, at a little distance from him was a sleek looking, well, but quite plainly dressed individual whom she did not know.

"You are Mrs. Blackman I think?" asked the superintendent addressing her very civilly.

"Yes Sir I be," Mrs. Blackman replied, dropping a slight respectful courtesy at the tall imposing presence of the officer in blue.

"Then Mrs. Blackman I should like to speak a few words with you, and—close the door please,"—said the officer in the same civil, quiet, almost deferential tone. "Will you kindly step outside?"

Mrs. Blackman meekly and obediently did

as she was told, and followed the tall superintendent, who with his calm leisurely official stride, stepped out into the middle of the carriage road where stood the sleek well-dressed man in plain clothes.

"I think, Mrs. Blackman you live here?—and sleep here?—You slept here last night? Is that not so?"

"Yes Sir I do—I did."

"And the black valet came here in the night did he not, and called your husband up?"

"Yes Sir he did. It was somewhere about one or two o'clock this morning part."

"And you didn't get up then Mrs. Blackman, when your husband was called did you?"

"No Sir. Leastways I got up and struck a light, an' when David come back and tells me as 'ow 'ed got to go to Vernwood Village, an' went out, you see Sir I gets into bed again."

"Yes exactly so Mrs. Blackman. And you were in bed till your husband returned?"

"Yes Sir."

"Till then you didn't get up at all."

"No Sir I didn't get out of bed. Not till I heerd David was come back, jes afore I heerd o' this here dreadful affair."

"And did you hear or see anything of the black valet after your husband had gone to Vernwood Village?" the tall officer asked.

"No Sir by course I didn't."

"Well Mrs. Blackman do you think you would have heard him if he had been near your cottage? Were you asleep or awake after your husband had left?"

"Well Sir, I reelly couldn't say Sir, I might a bin dozing off again, for you see Sir 'twere my washin' day 'esterday and I went to bed that tired out Sir."

"Yes I see," said Mr. Superintendent thoughtfully and dryly. "But look here now Mrs. Blackman, supposing there had been any one out with the dog, do you think you would have heard, if there had been any unusual

disturbance outside your bedroom window, for instance where the dog was tethered ? ”

“ Well reelly Sir I couldn't say for sure. By course the dog do very often move about and make a noise in the night, but we don't never take much notice o' that. Why there, only th' other night when David couldn't sleep, David says to me, ses he, I wish that great brute was farder away.”

“ Very good Mrs. Blackman, at any rate you were not disturbed by any unusual sounds after your husband had left ? ”

“ Well reelly Sir I couldn't say as 'ow I was, for as I said, I were reelly that drowsy and tired, neither asleep nor awake like, an' I'd sooner for certain not say.”

“ Thank you Mrs. Blackman that will do,” and with these words, and nodding to Mrs. Blackman with a kind smile of adieu, the tall superintendent, accompanied by the short fat sleek looking person in plain clothes, conversing together, walked off down the drive.

Mrs. Blackman drew a long sigh of relief as the two men walked away. Then she turned slowly round and walked slowly towards the door of the chalet.

For a short minute before entering she paused, and was deep in thought.

“Poor poor fellow ! Poor fellow !” she ejaculated to herself, and then she opened the door and went in.

Jules Massey, who was too overwhelmed even to know that she had left the room, was sitting on a stool with his face buried in his hands, rocking himself to and fro, groaning aloud in the deep and bitter anguish of his soul.

Mrs. Blackman went up to him, put her hand gently on his shoulder, and spoke comforting words.

But the wound that had gone through Jules Massey's heart was a wound that only the slowly assuaging influence of forgetfulness, of oblivion, of time, and the long roll of years could heal.

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Reader, as you lightly peruse these pages do you realize? Can you picture? Have you ever experienced the bald reality of the tale that is being told? As the grass that is mown, as the flowers that fade and wither, as the ears of corn in their ripeness and fulness of days are reaped and gathered in, so men and women fall around us day by day. But has it ever happened to you to be where the lurking phantom of assassination has raised its bloody hand, where the foul spirit of murder seems, though unseen, to haunt and defile the very air? If you have it is then then only, that you have learned and felt the loathsome presence of the fiend.

Murder! Till we come near it, or till that comes near to us, we realize not how dark and heinous, how appalling is the crime. We read of it in the daily prints that come to our homes, there seems in the minds of some, even a horrid fascination in the word. Even Death in his mildest kindest mood is the king of terrors in

our eyes, the parting perhaps for ever with those who most we have learnt to revere and love. Even when we leave them for a month, for a week, for a day, nay for an hour, we kiss and say good-bye. But when death comes, when we start the journey through that long, dark valley, in which all the travellers are travelling alone, and travelling onwards along that dark road by which none return, even then the great mystery excites our profoundest awe.

But when the ruthless hand of the assassin strikes to sever the mystic union of the body and soul, truly we are appalled, we give the deed the darkest place in our dark category of crime, we repay it by the extreme penalty that our laws can inflict, and we pronounce in fact —“Hast thou shed man’s blood, then by man shall thy blood be shed.”

Thus upon the once bright home of Vernwood there had fallen the terrible shadow which dogs the assassin’s trail.

When Mr. Police Superintendent Whittier, the dignified officer who had questioned Mrs. David Blackman, left with his short and sleek companion the vicinity of the châlet, the two men walked down the carriage drive, and thence out on to the broad lawn in front of the mansion, over which were scattered and dotted about here and there men and women in little groups, all absorbed in the one topic of the terrible tragedy which had been played.

A minute later Superintendent Whittier and Mr. Briggs (which was his companion's name), were joined by one or two constables in uniform, and other rather important looking persons in plain clothes.

Mr. Briggs was a retired local fell-monger, who having acquired a competency in his own trade had retired therefrom, and by some municipal manœuvre or sleight of hand or sleight of head, got his name placed on the local Commission of the Peace.

As is very common with such individualities

Mr. Briggs was an officious fussy busybody, ever seeking opportunity to bring his name into local repute. Thus, in the terrible tragedy of poor Bertram Gonault's murder, he at once saw an opportunity for the display of his own importance and acumen, and for the general airing, and exercise, and showing off of his newly acquired magisterial abilities and honours. Such a man often makes himself a public nuisance to all well conducted citizens of good taste.

"Of course 'twere that black fellow did it," put in Mr. Briggs, rubbing his small fat hands.

"It's all very well to say that," said the local sergeant of police who was standing by, "but what is there to prove it?"

"Prove it! Why circumstantial evidence of course. Who else could have committed the crime? Do you mean to tell me, Sergeant Hicks, that that black fellow *could* have been hanging about there all that time, just when the murder *must* have been committed, and saw

nobody go in or come out of that room, never saw a sight nor heard a sound of what was going on? Impossible! Of course he did it," and Mr. Briggs finished his argument with an air of incredulous contempt.

"Yes Mr. Briggs, the black valet does not say he was at the place when the murder was perpetrated. He says he was up by the *châlet*, which is nearly a quarter of a mile away."

"Yes—he says he was up with the dog, and what proof is there that he was with or near the dog. Not one tittle Sir, not one tittle," and Mr. Briggs again rubbed his small fat hands at what he regarded, on his part as quite a shrewd exposition of the law of evidence.

"Besides Sir," Briggs authoritatively resumed, "if you have any evidence on that point, any evidence at all, it goes to prove that he was not near the dog, or near the *châlet* at all, or else Sir, is it conceivable that Mrs. Blackman could have heard nothing of him from her own room. Pooh, perfectly absurd Sir. Perfectly absurd.

That black fellow did it and ought to be arrested before he takes himself off."

We will not follow this self-constituted council of local sages through their discussion, for the sequel will be shown by the result. It was a hastily improvised meeting, composed of a mixture of official blunder-headedness and local inexperience. The careers of those who constituted it were passed in the isolation of an English rural shire, and this was probably the solitary crime of its calibre which had come under their discretion in the whole course of their official and non-official lives. They had not been educated amid the seething millions of great cities, where the seeds of intemperance and sensualism and vice, sown in the hotbed of iniquity, spring up into envy hatred and malice, and blossom forth every twenty-four hours into the baneful flowers of crime.

However errant and wrong Superintendent Whittier might have been in his notions of his path of duty, however much at fault, his

duty once made apparent to him, the most exacting of his superiors could scarcely have accused him that he was imprompt in carrying that duty out.

Scarce one hour had elapsed from the time when the tall officer held his short conversation with Mrs. David Blackman before the *châlet*, when, in the well-appointed trap provided for his use, Mr. Superintendent Whittier again drove up to the same spot accompanied by one of his men.

Superintendent Whittier alighted, knocked at Mrs. Blackman's door, and on that good woman answering the summons the officer without any invitation walked in.

The ground floor of the *châlet* consisted of one somewhat spacious apartment, which was Mrs. David Blackman's kitchen, parlour, pantry, and drawing-room all in one.

In this apartment poor Jules Massey was still sitting as we left him an hour before.

The superintendent approached to where

Jules sat, and producing an official looking document, placing his hand on the black man's shoulder, read quickly through to him what was a warrant for Jules Massey's arrest on a charge of the wilful murder of his master Bertram Gonault.

There was nothing harsh, nothing imperative, nothing unkind, in Mr. Superintendent Whittier's tone, but however much at fault in taking Jules Massey into custody he might be, he conceived that he had a duty to perform.

By the time that the officer had finished reading his dire message, poor Jules seemed too dazed, too stunned and bewildered to comprehend or take in mentally either the words that were spoken or the circumstances of the case; then, as a few minutes brought him to himself he sobbed and sobbed and sobbed as if he had been a child, while Mrs. David Blackman who was a witness of the painful scene, walked to the window covering her face with her apron was scarcely less overcome.

But the tall, stern, calm, dignified, obdurate, officer stood by apparently unmoved.

Perhaps Superintendent Whittier's heart was hardened, perhaps it was rendered callous by the frequent scenes in which his duties led him to take a heartless and aggressive part.

At last, as Jules seemed too stupefied to move, the superintendent took him gently by the arm, while with his other hand he placed Jules' hat, which lay near him, upon his head; then almost as if by main force, he raised him to his feet and supported him, for his head hung down and the dark figure tottered and reeled and staggered like a drunken man.

Then, as he seemed almost utterly incapable of locomotion, the powerful officer almost carried bodily, rather than supported him, across the cottage floor out into the warm bright sunlight of the summer morning,—a sunlight indeed now so darkened, and under the shade of the tall overhanging trees, where

stood in waiting the superintendent's horse, and trap, and man.

Arrived thus far with his charge, Mr. Superintendent Whittier was beginning to congratulate himself that he had made a very successful arrest, and in comparative privacy, for there was an entire absence of that accumulation of lounging loiterers often present at such scenes, debased natures who seem to revel and gloat over the fall of a fellow-man.

But as Mr. Superintendent emerged from the cottage, almost carrying the helpless form, there was at least one attentive onlooker, there was one sagacious watcher of the unusual scene, whose keen eye and canine intelligence nothing escaped, for Monk who was tethered near, with continuously rising ire, and repeated deep-mouthed expressions of displeasure, noted every act and character of the lugubrious play.

At last Monk evidently felt that this unusual treatment of his dark friend had gone too far

to be longer endured, and with a yell of anger he tugged with all his great power at his restraining chain.

It is a useful truth to know, that in this world of imperfections, almost every chain has its weakest link, and at that weakest link it may break.

The chain which tethered Monk was no exception to this rule, the weak link parted and flew, and in the twinkling of an eye Monk was a free dog. The use which the canine monster made of his suddenly gained liberty the sequel will show. There was a loud growl of rage, a huge bound, and the great dog, which stood when on his hind legs as tall as the officer himself, had his two fore paws nearly on the constable's shoulders while the great teeth fastened savagely into the man's throat.

Overcome by the suddenness and ferocity of the attack, and the great overbearing weight of the animal, the tall superintendent came violently to the ground, while the dog, which

relinquished not for one moment the powerful grip of his jaws—which was a grip of the man's clothes rather than of his flesh—before any help could reach him, literally tore Superintendent Whittier's best uniform from his back, almost into shreds of blue cloth.

Superintendent Whittier's assistant constable seeing that his superior officer was in imminent peril of his life, came with drawn truncheon to his superior's aid. But the two men might as well have attempted to cope unarmed with an enraged lion, and what the earthly end of these two arms of the law would have been, but for the timely intervention of Mrs. David Blackman, is so plain that it is scarcely needful to relate.

However the woman finally succeeded in calming the outraged feelings of the dog, while in a sorrowful plight, the superintendent, more denuded of his uniform than suffering from any corporeal injury, regained his feet, while Monk—as far as he could be understood—uttering

all sorts of expressions of regret that he had not made shorter work of the superintendent, and greater use of his short term of liberty, was, in the hands of good Mrs. Blackman, led off the scene.

Left to his own devices, the horse in the superintendent's trap, regarding the bellicose attitude of the various powers with apprehension, trotted off. But he being a more tractable beast than Monk was finally secured.

Then, shaken, disconcerted, shorn, bereft of every vestige of the dignity of—as the immortal William Shakespere would probably have expressed it—"the divinity which hedged him in," Mr. Superintendent Whittier struggled painfully into his vehicle with his assistant and his charge, and the three drove away.



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